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Japanese ambiguous expression

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JAPANESE AMBIGUOUS EXPRESSION

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis addresses the relationship between the ambiguity that the Japanese apply in their communication and the societal thought that reflects Japan's cultural character.

It examines some characteristics of Japanese logic and its roots, why and how the Japanese shaped ambiguity in their communication, and how ideas from ancient belief and experience were reflected in rules of communication. It also examines how the structure of language contributes to ambiguous expression. Finally, it examines how accurately the translation of a Japanese text conveys the message.

The research reveals that the style of ambiguity that the Japanese language expresses is the by-product of sociocultural experiences. How societal values appear in communication resembles the syntax of the Japanese language. The ambiguous language with compacted meaning and loose syntax is easily distorted in translation.

PREFACE

Toward the end of my MA program in Fine Art, one of my advisers fell into a critical illness. As a result he was never able to come back on campus. All of a sudden, I lost an adviser who had been encouraging me and liked what I was doing. I ended up having three new advisers to replace the missing adviser. The difficult step was to explain my work to all of them without my trusted adviser. Since one adviser liked my art work, I thought that all other advisers would at least understand my pieces of work. However, I discovered how naive I was. The last two weeks before my MA Show almost ended in disaster. I had to explain the details of forms, colors, and textures which each medium expressed, why I chose them and what each would do for me in relation to what I was trying to express. In the process of these explanations, I realized how much more Japanese I was than I thought. What I thought then was that my artistic expression would be understood by anyone with an arts background similar to mine and that they could bridge between two cultures. But for the advisers my explanations and my visual products were illogical. I saw my art work through my past experience and the advisers could not understand my work. After all, everybody sees art through their own experience.

Explaining my reasons was a difficult process because I was still

thinking in Japanese and my advisers tried to hear my reasons with an American frame of mind. I was speaking English but was actually thinking Japanese using English vocabulary and syntax. I then realized the cultural differences in thought. I had to convince my advisers through three layers: thought, language, and visual references. I came from a different culture which has its own thought. I was unaware that my cultural subconsciousness had materialized in my work. I realized how little I knew about my self, since I was not convinced that I was explaining myself well in English, the language that my advisers understood visually and orally.

This was the beginning of my new search. I wished to find out more about how thought in a culture relates to how people express themselves visually and orally in one society and in return, how oral or visual expression further advances the community's thought to solidify the culture as whole. Each society had different visual and oral expressions, which differ from other societies. I thought, if I understood even a little part of this relationship which connects the thought and language of a culture, I could understand myself and my art and the art of others better. The trigger to bring my search into realization came when I started to teach Japanese at West Valley College. An idea came to me: if I could explain the relationship between Japanese language and Japanese thought, students would understand why the Japanese express things in a certain way. This would help students in their studies. Because this thought has been in my mind since finishing my fine arts education, I felt

a desire to study the link between language thought and society further and be able to make better explanations for my students.

According to Morimoto Tetsurō in his book Nihongo Omote to Ura (Japanese front and back), the 16th century Portuguese missionary Luis Frois who lived in Nagasaki recorded that in Japan, ambiguous expression is highly valued.[1] After a few ideas and proposed outlines about the thesis, I decided to study more about ambiguous expression in Japanese and related thoughts. I began to understand the reason why Japanese speak or act in a certain way. As a result I understand the background of my visual expression a little better and I feel more comfortable with it. That is the way people in the society in which I grew up think. I am happy and thankful that I have answered some of my questions through my research for this thesis. I appreciate that San Jose State University allowed me to research this in a wider focus as an interdisciplinary studies rather than as a single issue.

In writing this thesis, I did not have any intention of comparing societies as the main purpose of my research. I used comparison when it helped my explanation. Therefore, some sections of the main body may lean toward stereotyping but I do not mean it that way. I acknowledge that each society has similarities in many ways but I simply focused on how the Japanese society is in its own way idiosyncratic. I did all of the translations, except for those in Chapter Five which were translated by

[1] Morimoto Tetsurō, Nihongo Omote to Ura (Japanese front and back) (Tokyo: Sinchōsha, 1988), 18.

professionals from the original texts.

The early research was done through the Hoover Institution Library and Archives on the Stanford Campus to which Dr. Bruce Reynolds arranged my visits. Midway in my research my sister from Palo Alto made several trips in Tokyo, while visiting our mother there, to the Chūō and the Tama Libraries to collect copies of articles which I could not find in the Hoover archives. Toward the end of my research, Asuka Takamoto visited the National Library of Japan and spent one full day there for me to find missing information. For the past two years, many of my friends who made trips to Japan, offered their assistance by picking up books for me from many bookstores and publishers. To complete my research I was able to visit the Tokyo University Library. Dr. Shunsuke Otani wrote an official letter and even took me in to the Library with him. I could not pursue any of my writing without timely editing help from Bob Finch, Paul Kryska, Peter Aradi, Jeanann Collins, Dr. Reynolds, Dr. George Moore and Hiroko Fujimaki. The whole process would not have been possible without kind suggestions and cooperation from Dr. Lou Lewandowski, Dr. Chaote Lin, Dr. Reynolds, and Dr. Moore. To realize how Japan still is, was only possible through Japanese friends who are here through their husbands' business and the Japanese community here that surrounds them. I could not possibly have used the computer without the kindness of Michiko and Eric Ness since I did not have any idea which computer to purchase or which programs to use. I appreciate consultations from Sakae Fujita of the Monterey Institute of International

Studies, Noriko Yoneji of the University of Santa Clara and Dr. Shōko Homano of George Washington University.

I praise the dedication and sincerity of faculty and professors at San Jose State University who helped this student grow enormously in academic interest. I acknowledge that the education I received throughout the MA program was only possible here in the US.

I cannot find any word that fit exactly how I can express my appreciation to all of my family, friends (including those I have not mentioned) and professors, for providing encouragement, support and patience. I am very grateful.

Throughout this thesis, Japanese names are written with surname first since this is the Japanese norm. For accurate information for those who read Japanese, Japanese script is inserted after rōmaji and a translation follows in parenthesis.

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The way words are chosen reveals something about the speaker's mind. This holds true not only for individuals, but for speakers of a language as a whole. In Japanese, ambiguity is such a common characteristic of the language that people use it unconsciously. The reason for this ambiguity can be found in the Japanese sociocultural background and the structure of the language. This thesis is a search for an explanation of why Japanese communication seems ambiguous.

A basic element of a culture is thought and its corresponding language within the society. Without language, thought does not develop and vice versa. Without thought there is no culture. This thesis is a study of the relationship between Japanese thought and Japanese language, focused on the reasons for ambiguity. The reasons why the Japanese communicate ambiguously are found in the societal thought. Societal thought is that the whole community thinks alike because of certain standards which were set in the past.

The mold of a society is not made instantly. Therefore, the answers to be discovered are in the past of that society. Moreover the way people speak reflects that society's thought.

The reason that language reflects societal thought does not come into people's minds often, but it remains in their subconsciousness as the common logic of their particular society. In Japan, a subconsciousness

that developed from ancient times has become too common to even think about discussing it.

Primitive beliefs and how the community responded to their communication will be examined first. How early Japanese poets influenced the Japanese language and how these beliefs and the popularity of poetry influenced the way Japanese have communicated until today will be considered. Then, thoughts which developed from the experiences of ancient communal life will be examined together with how thought established in the ancient society is reflected in communication in Japan today. The mechanism through which Japanese communicate will be examined next together with the idea that Japanese communicate in a certain way as a consequence of their societal thought. The established societal thought is a product of experience in communal life. Communal life required everyone's cooperation for communal harmony. The communal logic made a mold for the community in how to communicate. Next is the syntax of the language and how it allows ambiguous expression. Finally it will be shown how difficult it is to translate a language which implies and suggests meaning. The distortion of meaning that translation creates make Japanese intention difficult to understand. Thus Japanese expression seems ambiguous to people from other societies.

I. Some Japanese Ideas About Language

Each language community of the world has its own beliefs. Certain beliefs relate to the unspoken rule of Japanese communication. This will explain one of the reasons why Japanese is perceived as an ambiguous language.

Each society has certain unique underlying assumptions and beliefs. Usually these beliefs have been firmly entrenched in society for a long period of time, shaping societal thought and forming the character of that society. Certain elements of this type which constitute a part of the Japanese character are still alive. One unique and unusual belief that appears in Japanese society in a variety of ways is *kotodama* 言霊 (the spirit of the word). This belief is one of the characteristics that Hasegawa Nyozekan noted in 1935. The Japanese character, which was fully established by the seventh century, has continued until the present day.[1] The idea of *kotodama* was noted early in Japanese history and passed on. The thought which developed from the belief in *kotodama* is still active in present society. The truth and meaning developed from belief in *kotodama* continues to form societal thought in Japan.

The early Japanese were afraid of *akurei* 悪霊, the fiendish spirits of darkness, sickness and wickedness. They called the most reprehensible

[1] Hasegawa Nyozekan, "Nihonteki seikaku no saikentō" (Reexamination of Japanese Character), Kaizō June 1935. 14.

fiend *Magatsuhi* マガツヒ. To get protection from *Magatsuhi*, people believed in the good spirit called *kotodama*. For the early Japanese, *kotodama* was the light that shone in the darkness against fear, and the darkness could not overcome it. According to a Shintō myth, there was a trial called *kukadachi* 探湯 which was conducted by *kami* 神 (deities). When a verdict was hard to reach, the accused, under oath, had to dip their hands into boiling water to get a decision. Those whose hands did not burn were innocent and those with burned hands were guilty.[2] After a *kukadachi* trial, *Magatsuhi* reformed and became a guardian. Ōmori Shirō writing about the outcome of the *kukadachi* trial notes that *Magatsuhi* was only a fiendish spirit which tempted humans to inhuman and dishonorable speaking. As a result of the hot water trial, *Magatsuhi* reformed into a deity who judged and guarded the orderliness and righteousness of the nation, protecting it against the malevolent word.[3] His duty was to prevent crimes of profanity or falsehood, thus protecting the order and righteousness of the nation. *Magatsuhi* reformed from a fiendish to a helpful spirit whom early Japanese depended on. This is a primitive belief which supports the power of the *kotodama* against maliciousness.

Kōjien, a dictionary, defines *kotodama*. In the early ages of Japanese history, people believed in the mysterious power that words

[2] Shinmura Izuru, Kōjien (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1964), 592.

[3] Ōmori Shirō, Nihon Bunkashi Ronkō (A Study of Japanese Cultural History) (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1975), 47.

possessed. Spiritual power existed in words and this power brought forth physical phenomena according to the meaning of words.[4] The meanings of words have a permanent reality in order for *kotodama* to be true. In other words: what people say in words will actually happen. So, one must choose words carefully to represent the truth. Otherwise, unexpected results might occur. As the Japanese would say, one must chose words carefully and be responsible, otherwise false words might bring on evil spirit. Egawa Genshō argues that, if *kotodama* were not true, words would lose power and could not be differentiated from simple sounds. Even one word cannot be allowed to be mistaken.[5] This belief in *kotodama* was passed on by oral tradition until it was recorded in the eighth century. The early Japanese wrote about their belief which helps explain popular thought in early society.

There is a collection of tales recorded in the Kojiki 古事記、(Records of Ancient Matters) completed in 712. According to Sonoda Minoru, the reason Ōno Yasumaro wrote the Kojiki was to pass on ancient wisdom and precepts to later generation. Ōno explains in the preface that Emperor Tenmu (673 - 690) had Hiedano Are memorize the chronology of past emperors and ancestral words. According to the Kojiki, Empress Genmei (708 - 717) ordered Ōno to codify them.[6]

[4] Shinmura, Kōjien, 787.

[5] Egawa Genshō, Kōkokuseishin to Kotodama (The Spirit of Empire and Kotodama) (Tokyo: Saiseisha, 1937), 2.

[6] Sonoda Minoru, Shintō (Tokyo: Kōbunsha, 1993), 44.

According to the Jindaiki神代記 (Records of the Kami Era) section of the Kojiki, the god Izanagi and the goddess Izanami came down to the earth with a commission called "*kotoyo sashi no mikoto*" 言依サシの神言 (commission of the gods' words). Therefore, they became *mikotomochi* 神言実行者 (persons who execute the gods' words) and created the islands of Japan.[7] Many of these tales are the myths which became the source for the distinctive character of the society.

Belief in *kotodama* is a part of that character and influenced later poets to convey ideas about *kotodama* in the Manyōshū 万葉集, (an anthology of poems). The Manyōshū consists of twenty volumes and is a collection of forty five hundred and fifteen poems assembled during a period of one hundred and thirty years. It has been said that Tachibana Moroe (684 - 757) collected them and Ōtomo no Yakamochi (718? - 785) added more to the collection.[8] These poems were written phonetically by using *manyōgana*[9] because the Japanese could express their thoughts more comfortably that way than by using Chinese characters. *Manyōgana* phonetically represented Japanese characters at that time and are believed to be a step in the process of developing the *hiragana* syllabary. Most of the poems were written from around the time of Emperor Tenchi (668 - 672) until the end of the Nara period, a one

[7] Sonoda, 50.

[8] Shiba Ryōtarō, Ueda Masaaki and Kimu Tarusu, Nihon no Dorai Bunka (The Imported Culture of Japan) (Tokyo: Chūōkōronsha, 1991), 205.

[9] Ibid.

hundred twenty to thirty year period. Authors varied from the emperor at the top of society to peasants at the bottom.[10] Yoshida Kanehiko states that the origin of some of old words which appear in the poems are inferred to trace back to the Jōmon period (about 300 BC. and before).[11] Some wrote poems about *kotodama*.

One poem in the Manyōshū describes Japan as "*kotodama no tasukuru kuni* "言霊のたすくる国 (the land that *kotodama* aids). The poem explains that the people of Japan thought about their land as the place where *kotodama* endlessly protects their lives from becoming chaotic through the work of evil, or villains. The Japanese thought that otherwise the impurity and shame of *Magatsuhi* would turn them into horrible unworthy people. Ōmori explains that there was a belief that a good spirit named *kotodama* endlessly helps and protects the human world which otherwise would be contaminated by evil spirits.[12]

Writing poetry was a passion in China. Cultural influence from China originated during the Six Dynasties (222 - 589), passed to the court of the Paekche Kingdom in Korea and then to Japan.[13] Shiba Ryōtarō writes that the culture that came into ancient Japan could be defined as a cultural gene for later society. In ancient times the country of Paekche

[10] Ōmachi Hōei, Nihon Bunmeishi (A History of Japanese Culture) (Tokyo: Hakubunkan, 1905), 84, 85.

[11] Yoshida Kanehiko, Manyō Gogen (Manyō Etymology) (Tokyo: Sōtakusha, 1991), 9, 10.

[12] Ōmori, Nihon Bunkashi Ronkō, 46.

[13] Yamamoto Shichihei, Nihonjin to wa Nanika (What are the Japanese), Vol. 1 (Tokyo: PHP Kenkyūjo,1990), 47.

(345-660) was located in the Southeast region of the Korean Peninsula and is presently a part of South Korea. Paekche imported Chinese culture. Paekche learned the culture of the Six Dynasties located in the Yangtze Valley. This same culture came into Japan through Paekche. Japanese called the Six Dynasties "*Kure*" 呉 then. Aristocrats of the Six Dynasties valued a life style of *"feng liu"* 風流 which in Chinese means "great and noble hearted, distinguished and admirable," but the character "feng" represents "wind" and "liu" represents "flow" and so Japanese related the word "feng liu" to nature, read it "fūryū" and translated it as poetic expression and delight in nature rather than being character qualities.[14] Once Chinese style poetry was introduced into Japan, it first became popular in the imperial court before it spread among the rest of the people. The Japanese adopted the idea of "*fūryū*" into the oral tradition and it continued to be recognized as the style for poetry still practiced today. One of the rules for a poem is to limit the number of phonetic characters representing syllables which poets have to use skillfully to convey their thoughts and feelings. The Japanese call these poems *waka* 和歌 (Japanese poems). With *waka*, the Japanese were exchanging and passing ideas, and expressing and understanding condensed thought in compacted wording. It was a way to communicate, especially with succeeding generations. Ideas which were passed on from generation to generation in the form of *waka* were integrated into

[14] Shiba Ryōtarō, Kono Kuni no Katachi (The Shape of This Country) (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū, 1990), 175, 176.

society over centuries and influenced societal thought. Egawa describes how the early Japanese passed on ancient messages. Since ancient time, *kotodama* was passed on by *waka*. *Waka* were a way to pass on the spirit of ancestors, such as the belief in *kotodama*, and one's own thoughts to descendants. Writing *waka* required condensed meaning because of the limits of the syllable count. Precision of words required by *kotodama* insured everlasting life for the message in *waka*.[15] Many poems in the Manyōshū describe the power of *kotodama*. Other poems describe Japan as the land of *kotodama*. A poem in the Manyōshū tells how the country of Japan has been revered.

"Jindai yori	神代より	Since the age of the gods,
iitsute kiraku	言い伝て来らく	it has been said
		and passed on:
soramitsu	そらみつ	
yamato no kuni wa	倭の国は、	The country of Japan
sumekami no	皇神の	is the emperor god's
itsukushiki kuni	厳しき国	solemn country,
kotodama no	言霊の	the land where
sakiwau kuni to	幸はう国と	*kotodama* thrives, thus
kataritsugi	語り継ぎ	it has been continuously
iitsugaikeri	言い継がひけり	said and passed on.
ima no yo no	今の世の	In the present world,
hito mo	人も	people also see it

[15] Egawa, 4.

kotogotoku	悉	
me no mae ni	目の前に	before their eyes
mitari shiritari ... "	見たり知りたり	and know...[16]

Kōjien defines, "*kotodama no sakiwau kuni*" as the land filled with happiness by the [respectable power of] the spirit of words.[17] People learned this concept by hearing it from their elders, who in turn had heard it from their elders for generations.

Kotodama 's first character is *koto* 言, meaning word or language. Ogyū Sorai (1666 - 1728) explained that in ancient Japanese, "*koto*" 言 (word), and "*koto*" 事 (matter) are synonyms.[18] Yanabu Akira states that "*koto*" is *yamato-kotoba*, the Japanese language which is believed not to be influenced by foreign languages, and contained the meanings of both "*koto*" (word), and "*koto*" (matter). When words like "*mikoto*" 命, which is "*koto*" with an honorific prefix, are read in ancient records, they contain the meaning of "life" as well as "*mikoto*" 御言 (honorific word) and "*mikoto*" 御事 (honorific matter).[19] Kawazoe Taketane also states that

[16] Sonoda, 223.

[17] Shinmura, Kōjien, 841.

[18] Ikeda Jirō and Ōno Susumu, Ronshu, Nihon Bunka no Kigen, Dai 5kan, Nihonjinshu Ron, Gengogaku (Debates on the origin of Japanese culture, Volume 5: Debates on the Japanese Race, Linguistics), (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1973), 306.

[19] Yanabu Akira, Honyakugo no Ronri (Theory of Translation) (Tokyo: Hōsei Daigaku Shuppanbu, 1980), 227.

"*koto*" (matter) replaced "*koto*" (word) in the Kojiki.[20]

The second character is *dama* which is phonetically changed from *tama* in the rule of *rendaku* 連濁, where the first consonant of the second word in a compound word changes from voiceless to voiced. *Tama* 靈 means spirit or soul as the meaning of the *kanji* shows. The shades of meaning contained in the word *koto* include the meaning of innermost matter which is described by skill in language, and *dama* includes the living soul of a true heart, or the inner spiritual force. *Kotodama* is heart and truth; therefore, words and actions must be connected together as the word contained the meanings of word, matter spirit and life all together in ancient times. Consequently, one must chose the right words for speech and take responsibility to follow them. Egawa writes that to worship the great *kotodama* is to worship the great *kokoro* (heart, in the sense of a warm heart). *Kotodama* means that human spirit and action are one; therefore, language must avoid confusion in differences among public and private, honorable and humble.[21]

Kotodama is a part of Shintō 神道 (the kami way), but it is thought rather than religion, although it might be said that the belief in *kotodama* has become more religious than religion itself in Japanese life. Accordingly, one must not say any word other than that for which one

[20] Kawazoe Taketane, Kojiki Oyobi Nihonshoki no Kenkyū (Studies in The Records of Ancient Matters and The Chronicles of Japan) (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1973), 27.

[21] Egawa, 12.

will take responsibility.[22] This has led the Japanese to believe that people who talk too much are untrustworthy. [23]

An example of the continuing belief of *kotodama* may be found in San Jose, California. At the Aikidō Dōjō, a studio of Japanese-style (self defense) martial arts, on Sixth Street in San Jose's Japantown, an instructor, teaches about *kotodama* as truth with inner force like a light in the darkness, as if *kotodama* is life and the life is the light.[24] In most old world communities, people commonly connected themselves to the spiritual world, usually by the religion that each society believed in. In Japan the beliefs of Shintō have become fundamental in the thinking of those who engage in the martial arts. Shintō's spirituality is reinforced and re-experienced during martial arts training. The masters of martial arts train their students not only in the skill of the art but also in the spiritual truth of engaging in the art.[25] Therefore, their movement must be clean to reflect their cleansed mind. Students are trained in cleansing the mind as a daily exercise so they may use purity of force. Aikido training is not to force strength artificially but to maintain the flow of nature (movement) within nature (physical possibility), and never to twist

[22] Itō Nagamasa, "Genzonsuru Shinsōshinri no Chigai" (Differences in depth psychology at present) Keizai Ōrai. Feb. 1979. 225.

[23] Ibid. See also Dean C. Barnlund, Nihonjin no hyōgenkōzō (The Structure of Japanese expression) translated by Nishiyama Sen and Sano Masako (Tokyo: Saimaru Shuppankai, 1975). 107.

[24] Field study by the author.

[25] John Stevens, The Essence of Aikido: Spiritual Teachings of Morihei Ueshiba (Tokyo: Kōdansha International, 1993). 22.

nature. It requires skill, knowledge and strong belief in truthfulness in thinking which students believe is interwoven with *kotodama*.[26]

Several more examples of *kotodama* can be found in the names of people, things and places in Japan. These names are represented by using *kanji* which give meaning to the phonetic sound of the original words. *Kanji*, the characters the Japanese adopted from China, have meaning as well as phonetic representation. Since each *kanji* has meaning, and many *kanji* read the same phonetically, people want to choose *kanji* with the most favorable meaning as well as the desired sound. Names of things were chosen originally for these reasons. They simply took the *kanji* representing the reason. But later some people replaced the written form with different *kanji* with the same sound as the original names. Many times, the reason for choosing different *kanji* was to give a more impressive, powerful and respectable meaning to the names. Shinmura Izuru notes that in Japan for a long time there were many phonetically equivalent characters used interchangeably. This character switching reflects the still existing old primitive belief, *kotodama*. This firmly rooted practice is alive in regard to names of people, places, and things as a phenomenon of traditional respect for beautiful and respectable names. [27]

An example of *kanji* replacement is in the name of a place called Amagasaki. A long time ago when Japan was still forming as a nation, a

[26] John Stevens, 32.

[27] Shinmura Izuru, "Gogen Chishiki to Gogen Ishiki" (Etymology of Knowledge and Etymology of Consciousness) Gengo Seikatsu, August 1954, 19.

general from China landed at the tip of a peninsula in Japan with his troops. This general selected a spot for their camp and kissed the land for a blessing. In doing so, he tasted the sweetness of the earth. Afterward, people called this place "Amagasaki" 甘が崎 (Cape Sweet). Now, however, people write the same place "Amagasaki" 尼が崎 (Cape Nun). How and when the character replacement took place is unknown.[28] But nuns who relate themselves to the spiritual world are more admirable than the physical pleasure of sweetness. So, the spiritual word "nun" is more respectable to the Japanese than the mere physical word "sweet." This is an example of the influence of *kotodama*.

Over a history of thirteen hundred years, Japanese beliefs have been expressed in many different forms. They reinforced the national spirit in times of crisis. Belief in *kotodama* must have existed before the recording of Japanese history and was instrumental on such occasions. *Kotodama* was expressed in the Nihonshoki 日本書紀 (Chronicles of Japan), written for political reasons, and completed in 720 after a hundred or so years of compilation, to impress the dynasty in China and prove the importance and value of Japan as a nation. It was later misused to reinforce Imperial dominance before World War II. Peter Dale argues that "the misinterpretation of *kotodama* was employed for the purpose of mass mobilization."[29] The Japanese military twisted the faith that the ordinary

[28] The author heard this story as a child.

[29] Peter Dale, The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 85.

Japanese had and pretended that they were operating under it to further imperialism. The Japanese were taught to have faith in their country's mythology. Mythology has a place in the Japanese religion Shintō. The center of Shintō was the emperor, because the emperor was believed to be the direct descendant of *kami*. Kawazoe states that in the Kojiki, the Emperor is treated as equal to *kami*. The thought that the descendant of *kami* is the emperor existed then. It describes the connection between *kami* and humans, indicating a possibility that a human could change into *kami* or vice versa.[30]

Other ancient communities possessed similar beliefs. Yamamoto compares God in the Old Testament to Japanese deities who descended on the island of Japan as Izanami and Izanagi, goddess and god. Yamamoto notes that in the second chapter of Genesis in the Christian Bible, God walked on the earth in the garden of Eden. Izanagi and Izanami, god and goddess, were also gods who walked on the earth, and they are the characters in the tale "the Birth of the Country."[31] When the nation believed in the country's mythology, and had faith in Shintō, it took little effort for the Japanese military to deceive the nation using the name of the Emperor. This led to the nation's military defeat, but the belief continues like an invisible warp in the society.

Many ancient communities believed in the spirituality of words. The Gospel of John in the Christian Bible begins:

[30] Kawazoe, 525.

[31] Yamamoto, 120.

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

This passage is similar to how the Japanese understand *kotodama.* However, the belief in *kotodama* evolved because the Japanese were afraid of being shamed as irresponsible individuals. The Japanese depend on something they can expect to exist, something that reflects one's consciousness. Lev Vygotsky explains the spirituality of words:

> The word is a direct expression of the historical nature of human consciousness. Consciousness is reflected in a word as the sun in a drop of water. A word relates to consciousness as a living cell relates to a whole organism, as an atom relates to the universe. A word is a microcosm of human consciousness.[32]

A component of Japanese character in present society is a thought which was developed from the belief in *kotodama*. The Japanese practice their belief in *kotodama* and the element of responsibility it contains as the main idea in their communication. The Japanese still believe that words have spirit and what is said will occur. Furthermore, the Japanese believe what occurs is the responsibility of the one who spoke. The proverb *"Kuchi wa wazawai no mon"* 口は禍の門 (The mouth is the gateway to disaster) explains the Japanese attitude about verbalization;

[32] Lev Vygotsky, Thought and Language (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1989), 256.

that is, you must restrain your language when you talk to others since speech often triggers disaster.[33] The responsibility for one's words came from the idea of *kotodama* and the communication of condensed thoughts in compressed expression within a limited number of phonetic characters, as in *waka*, affected the Japanese way of communicating.

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[33] Sakurai Masanobu and Suzuki Giichi, Kotowaza, Kakugen Jiten (Dictionery of Proverbs and Aphrisms) (Tokyo: Nagaoka Shoten, 1989), 109.

II. Behind Japanese Expression

There must be some explainable reasons why the Japanese communicate in a certain way. This chapter examines how communal consciousness affected Japanese societal thought. This will help us to understand one of the reasons why the Japanese express themselves in ambiguous language.

Responsibility is a dominant element of societal thought in Japan. In fact, an important guide for judging a person is whether a person has a "*sekinin kan*" 責任感 (feeling for responsibility). The Japanese judge each other by how strong a feeling of responsibility a person has "*sekininkan ga tsuyoi ka usui ka*" 責任感が強いか薄いか (Is a feeling of responsibility strong or thin?) rather than if one is responsible or not. When the Japanese talk about the responsibility of a person, they mean the degree of responsibility allocated according to a person's position in society, the community, or the project in which he or she is participating. The feeling of responsibility is based on whether a person follows his or her word and takes care of communal needs voluntarily. The ultimate communal need leads to an undisturbed life for everyone in the community. A person who has a feeling for responsibility is trusted and liked within the community. Such a person would experience shame if he or she neglected the feelings of others in the group. This kind of anxiety for community needs causes the Japanese to seek a natural development and

relationship within the community. The Japanese often feel responsible for harmony with everyone interrelating with him or her within a group. When the natural order, societal order and personal order match and balance, one expects a natural harmonious development, instead of a forced one. Moreover, if the result is natural, then there are no feelings of guilt or shame.

Universally, people in a community depend on and take care of each other. The Japanese are not exceptions, especially concerning the feelings of other members of the group. In addition, the Japanese are concerned about how the community will judge them. Each Japanese has a strong feeling of affiliation to the community to which he or she belongs and is afraid of being excluded from that group. Therefore, the Japanese are careful to avoid saying or doing anything that may disturb others in their ordinary life. Morita Sōhei describes how the Japanese constrain their appearance and view of themselves with others.[34] The Japanese worry most about how they appear to others and how they are judged by other people.[35] How will they get accepted in the community is their basic thought. The community's interest is the individual's interest and the emphasis is to preserve harmony in the community rather than to protect each individual's personal rights. Preserving harmony in the community is to keep every person unperturbed mentally and emotionally. The Japanese avoid upsetting the feelings of others as

[34] Morita Sōhei, "Nihonjin no yūki to mentsu" (Japanese Courage and Face) Kaizō, January 1938, 372.

[35] Ibid.

this will upset communal harmony. A person prefers not to be outspoken. Instead of being an individualist he or she will withdraw to avoid confrontation in order to preserve harmony in the community, even if personal feelings must be sacrificed. Barnlund observes that the Japanese would rather choose silence over saying "no" or "I disagree." They choose silence because they are afraid to disturb the order and the harmony of the group. " [36]

The Japanese would rather remain quiet, than to object. The Japanese will sacrifice themselves with pride to honor communal harmony. Morita explains that the national character of the Japanese is to "know the shame," and to accept "the feeling of defeat" with difficulty. The Japanese know if they disturb the harmony of the community, then they will feel shame and defeat. The Japanese might not like to hear that, for they are proud and like to keep their face, even in giving up their life for honor. Yet, Morita adds, they will also choose death in order to sustain their honor.[37] Bernard Krisher observes that 16,200 Japanese took their lives in 1972 including one father who killed himself to atone for the "shameful deeds" of his radical son.[38] Verbalizing one's opinion clearly seems useless in Japanese society since such action is undesirable and traditionally despised. Opinionated people in Japanese society have a

[36] Barnlund, Nihonjin no hyōgenkōzō, 73.

[37] Morita, 372.

[38] Bernard Krisher, "Who are the Japanese?" News week, volume 80. July 17, 1972, 35.

difficult time finding a job because the society considers the harmonious quality of a person a priority. For instance, new employees on the first day of the job, might expect to hear from a manager "work hard" or "do a good job." Instead, they will hear "*nakayoku yatte kudasai*" 仲良くやってください (please work in harmony).[39] So, instead of taking the risk of expressing their opinion, they agree with the majority[40] in order to avoid feelings of guilt and responsibility. If the result of their speaking leads to misunderstanding, it creates an unexpected and undesired outcome. Hence, they choose to say nothing when they cannot agree. An excerpt from Dean Barnlund's book tells how the Japanese are raised in order to be a person who is accepted in the community :

> Halloran, in Japan: Images and Realities, contrasts the ordination of the individual in the East with his deification in the West. In a chapter entitled "We the Japanese" he synthesizes the interpersonal attitudes of a typical but fictitious Japanese: "As I grew up, my parents taught me to keep my own thoughts to myself if I didn't agree with other people. It is very important, they said, that my actions and thoughts be in harmony with the actions and thoughts of other people with whom I have a personal relationship, and to subordinate myself to our family and the school and the company."[41]

Silence maintains balance and harmonizes societal order. Moreover, as previously mentioned, the standard of the society is that a person who talks too much is not trusted.

The need to be accepted within society produces a feeling of

[39] Field study by the author.

[40] Kishida Hide and Yamamoto Shichihei, "Nihonjin to 'Nihonbyo' ni tsuite" (Concerning the Japanese and "the illness of being Japanese"), Shokun, July 1979, 133.

[41] Barnlund, Dean C., Public and Private Self in Japan and United States, Commuicative Styles of Two Cultures (Tokyo: The Simal Press, 1982), 59.

responsibility for one's own family or group. No member wishes to disgrace his or her own group, family or community as a result of carelessness, especially with the wrong choice of words. On the other hand, members are comfortable in agreeing with what the majority decide to do, even though there are many poor decisions made by the majority. To get along in the society, they were taught to think and do things like everyone else. Kishida Hide and Yamamoto Shichihei explain this phenomenon in Japan: the index of action is to follow the decision made by the majority of the community, the people to whom one relates. This maintains harmony.[42] This feeling of responsibility is reflected in the community as the framework of the national character. Krisher observes that Japan's most obvious virtue--national harmony--is the product of its peculiar circumstances: a large population inhabiting a small chain of islands with limited natural resources.[43]

Driving through American farm land, people spot a single house standing in a vast field. It takes a while to see another house, which also stands alone in the middle of a vast field. This suggests that each family is an independent, self supporting, single unit, completely separated from neighboring units. American agricultural society was constructed on the philosophical belief in individual rights and freedom. This attitude is maintained among Americans even in metropolitan areas. On the contrary, riding a train in Japan, people see groups of houses in the fields

[42] Kishida and Yamamoto, 133.

[43] Krisher, 35.

and can also see other groups of houses nearby, indicating that a group of families as a unit support each other. In a group of families there are close knit relations between people. Kishida and Yamamoto argue that the society of Japan is a product of an early agricultural culture. This type of society would not be formed without people communicating with each other all the time in the village,[44] like similar close knit communities throughout the world. The agricultural society Kishida and Yamamoto describes is one developed in the early stages of Japanese history when people depended on production of staples for survival.

Yamamoto writes about an excavated ancient village. Toroiseki 登呂遺跡 (The Ruins of Toro), which was excavated by Dr. Higuchi Kiyoyuki in 1947, indicates how the Japanese were living during that time. There are different opinions about the exact age of the ruin, but it dates roughly from 57 to 260 if not earlier.[45] Toroiseki displays ruins of many houses closely located next to a divided rice field. It gives an idea that people in Japan were living in the same pattern of settlement then as the rather scanty Chinese record indicates and as they do now. People in a group of families, as in any tribal culture, must have depended on and helped each other. These people also must have shared their duties and corporate responsibilities, not only for their field work but also against natural disasters, which Japan has annually.[46] Japan experiences

[44] Kishida and Yamamoto, 135.

[45] Yamamoto, 42.

[46] Barnlund, Nihonjin no hyōgenkōzō, 21.

typhoons and earthquakes yearly; consequently, members in the community must work together to protect their fields and produce. They must have communal objectives and work cooperatively together.[47] Suzuki Daikichi suggests that Japanese society developed from people having to help each other. Cooperative work was a necessity for rice cultivation during severe seasonal changes. It is easy to imagine that people had relationships involving helping and being helped in return.[48] Each member had to understand his or her responsibility to the corporate community. Generations kept changing, but in Japan members of the community preserved the same values and the same relations among families. Even members who expanded their relations remained within the unit. Araki Hiroyuki states that in spite of changes in lifestyle, the relationship of kin in a cooperative community which was formed during the Yayoi period (about 300BC to 100AD) has not changed and has been passed on until the present.[49] In other communities in the world, as populations shifted and increased, they influenced and integrated with each other; therefore, unlike the Japanese, people in those communities either went through many value changes or became strict believers that their way of life was only right way and would not to harmonize with others.

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[47] Araki Hiroyuki, Nihongo kara Nihonjin o Kangaeru (Thinking about the Japanese through the Japanese Language) (Tokyo : Asahi Shuppan 1980), 30.

[48] Suzuki Daikichi, Nihonjin to Ningen Kankei (The Japanese and Their Relationship) (Tokyo: Ikkōsha, 1979), 90.

[49] Araki, 78.

Industrialized Japanese organizations make similar efforts like cooperative work and responsibility by each member, to adhere to the tradition of corporate responsibility. Each employee must understand and accept similar responsibilities. Since a company's objective is to produce products of the highest quality for higher profit, all employees are expected to be responsible for their assigned duty without close supervision. The higher profit naturally produces better return to the community. An article in the March 1982 issue of Chūōkōron, states that there is a nearly fanatic habit of quality improvement in industry. All employees are endlessly enthusiastic in improving the product; at the same time, each employee is expected to examine the quality of every product which passes through his or her station.[50] Although this industrial management uses a methodology which originated in the U.S.A., the Japanese workers take responsibility for the products and for the company in their traditional way.

The Japanese are interested in improving their immediate life, which emphasizes higher quality for a better return in Japanese industry. On the other hand, American technology is interested in the bigger view for the human future. For instance, the Japanese imported the American invention of the transistor and used it in applications for every day life. The Americans incorporated the transistor into the space program.[51] Two

[50] "Nihon wa mohan ka " (Is Japan a Model?) Chūōkōron, March 1982, 409.

[51] Hayashi Shūji, Nihonkei no Jōhō Shakai (The information society of the Japanese type) (Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku shuppankai,4th ed., 1993), 26, 27.

different cultures show different thought processes. Each displays societal thought which represents the national character of the community. One community thinks about its immediate surroundings with people and their life and the other thinks to further development in the scientific field. The Japanese focus has been strongly on their own community rather than on humanity as whole. It is a difference between the community which develops from kinship[52] and the community which believes in rights for the individual.

In early Japan, groups of families made up a village, and the villages made up the next larger community and so on until many larger units formed the nation of Japan. There were always attempts to unify the country by emperors and powerful leaders, especially in times when systems of belief and cultural concepts come into conflict. On such occasions, the idea of harmony contributed to calm the disturbances within the society.

The Japanese must have found value in harmony over a long time, even before it was recorded historically in the seventh and eighth century, or even before Confucianism came into Japan. What existed in Japan originally contained the idea of "*wa*" 和 (harmony) for sure. Ōkawa Shūmei states that the teachings of Confucius do not contain the idea of harmony. Benevolence, duty, courtesy, humanistic volition, filial piety, and obedience are the precepts of Confucianism, and a precept of

[52] Kō Eri, "Nihonjin - nihonminzoku- no kokka ishiki no tokuchō ni tsuite" (On the Characteristics of the National Consciousness of the Japanese-the Japanese People), Shisō no Kagaku, January 1972, 50.

harmony is not included in his teaching.[53]

At the beginning of the seventh century, when the country fell into chaos, Prince Shōtoku (574-622) proclaimed a seventeen-article constitution in 604 to guide people and avoid further conflict. One cause of the conflict was resistance to Buddhism when Buddhism was proclaimed as the official religion of the country in 594.[54] The first article of Prince Shōtoku's constitution was to resolve matters by using harmony as a tool which states, "harmony is to be valued and an avoidance of wanton opposition to be honored.[55] This article emphasized a harmonious public and private life. What Prince Shōtoku did was to guide people to accept Buddhism, but at the same time maintain the old system. In fact, in his constitution, Prince Shōtoku chose to harmonize Buddhist thought with the existing Confucianism and Shintō thought to make the transformation more acceptable and reduce potential friction. Prince Shōtoku set an example for later time. Kōno Shōzō notes that it is extremely clear that Shōtoku made every possible effort to harmonize Confucianism and Buddhism in the Seventeen-article Constitution.[56]

[53] Ōkawa Shūmei, Nihonteki Genkō (Japanese Style Speech and Conduct) (Tokyo: Bunrokusha, 1930), 2.

[54] Tsunoda Ryūsaku, Sources of Japanese Tradition, (New York: Colombia University Pres, 1964), xix, 594, 604.

[55] Kokutai no hongi kaisetsu sōsho (Commentary on the Cardinal Principles of the National Entity) (Tokyo: Monbushō kyōgakukyoku, 1944), 245. See also Robert King Hall, ed. Kokutai no Hongi, trans. John Owen Gauntlett (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), 93ff.

[56] Kōno Shōzō, Waga Jōdai no Kokutaikannen (Ideas of the National Entity in Ancient Japan) (Tokyo: Kokumin seishin bunka kenkyūjo, 1934), 25.

Confucianism was brought to Japan early enough to be already established in the community before Buddhism was introduced. Originating in China, Confucianism had played an active part in Yamato society, but it did not take a form like institutionalized religion which provides people with a place for worship. Instead, there were teachers and seminars to discuss the ideas of Confucianism. Yoshikawa Kōjirō informs us that Confucianism is ordinarily thought of as a teaching whose objective is to contribute to morality, but indispensably requires a knowledge of history and literature. The religious feeling, which is a special characteristic of the Japanese, affects the texts of Confucianism in Japan. Therefore, Confucianism was endowed with religious sacredness in Japan.[57] Later, the Kamakura and Tokugawa governments took advantage of parts of Confucian thought to mold the behavior and thought of the populace. Confucianism teaches one to honor and respect parents and superiors, to accomplish one's duty diligently, and to fulfill one's obligations. Throughout the history of Japan, Confucianism, like the belief in *kotodama*, changed forms on the surface but kept its content beneath the surface to justify and perpetuate its position. Buddhism was blended in later.

Ōmachi explains the similarity of two major events in the past. Prince Shōtoku's seventeen-articles constitution was a guide for the nation, indicating the direction for the people when two belief systems,

[57] Yoshikawa Kōjirō, "Nihon seishin o keisei shita mono" (Things That Formed the Japanese Spirit) Bungeishunjū, Aug. 1951, 35.

Buddhism and Shintō, conflicted. The educational spirit of the Meiji period was similar. When the conflict of two ideas, adoration of the West and the desire to preserve national characteristics, caused the nation to lose its direction, Emperor Meiji pointed out the way for the nation by promulgating the Kyōiku Chokugo 教育勅語 (The Imperial Rescript on Education) in 1890.[58]

The description in the Nihon Shoki calling Japan *Yamato* 大和 (great harmony), makes clear that communal harmony has been a concern of the Japanese. During the nineteenth century, when Western ideas came to Japan, many Japanese thought that the old traditions were no longer sufficient. Emperor Meiji proclaimed the Kyōiku Chokugo for guidance and to preserve traditional thinking as well as Imperial rule to insure his hegemony. Kokutai no hongi kaisetsu sōsho (Commentary on the Cardinal principles of the National Entity) explains harmony: religious asceticism is denying self to establish the existence of *kami*. At the same time, self is affirmed morally which establishes its existence within the *kami*.[59] For instance, in a conversation, the way to establish harmony between a speaker and a listener is to eliminate both egos. The successful communicators will find peacefulness in their consciousness.

These beliefs and ideas which deal with people's consciousness are like clay. Clay gets pushed, twisted, pounded and stretched, according to the need of society or the ruler. Clay gets shaped, glazed and fired, but

[58] Ōmachi, 59.

[59] Kokutai no hongi kaisetsu sōsho, 266.

there is always raw clay left under the people's feet and no matter what its shape it is still clay. Thoughts that shape a community are similar to clay. According to people's needs, their understanding and acceptance, their thoughts are guided in various ways, but the basic pattern of those thoughts has not changed.

An example of traditional thought which is still honored and still actively practiced has been handed down to the families in an area of California called Silicon Valley. Many families from Japan live there because the family head is sent by a Japanese company to do business. These families live in the U.S. while the heads of the families are completing their assignments, which usually last a few years. The length of their stay depends on the nature of the company's business and their assignments. Most Japanese families try to blend into the Californian life style. However, they unconsciously sustain their traditional way of life, especially when they deal with people in their community back home. If the parents of a wife want to visit California, they respectfully and quietly wait until the parents of the husband visit first. The parents of the wife honor the importance of the parents of the husband, and think that it is their duty to wait their turn.[60] This idea is shared in Japanese society. Without exception, this is how the society expects people to behave. This is the traditional way handed down from parents to children, even to the younger generations in California.

The thoughts that shape Japanese society are like a river. Rivers

[60] Persons referred to are friends of the author.

begin with many small streams which join into a main stream. The main thoughts running through Japanese society were founded in ancient times and many thoughts joined into the main stream as time went on. Shintō, Confucianism, and Buddhism are three of the major philosophies or streams, which influenced societal thought in early Japan and continue to the present day.

Another example from observation of the families of Japanese businessmen in California shows the never changing traditional idea of responsibility. A teenage daughter came home from a dental appointment and reported to her mother, in front of the author and other guests her mother had for afternoon tea, " The dentist said that the reason I have decay is not my fault because, after all, I brush and floss my teeth twice a day." Her mother replied, "Whose fault was it, then? [Could it be mine?] I wonder, perhaps I did not take care of myself and did not eat properly during my pregnancy with this daughter?"[61] The daughter is concerned about her responsibility for ending up with tooth decay. But it is the mother who worries about her responsibility for causing her daughter's decayed teeth. In spite of the fact that this daughter was born in the US. and grew up in the US. for most of her life, the framework of Japanese traditional thought is already forming in this young Japanese and is expressed in her Japanese.

Because society values harmony, all ideas had to be harmonized. For example, the Japanese now live with thoughts of obligation from

[61] Ibid. This is the author's recollection of the conversation.

Confucianism, get married in a Shintō ceremony, and go through a Buddhist service after death. Can Westerners think of a society that is Jewish where people get married in a Christian ceremony and are buried in a Moslem service? To the Westerner, the Japanese mind must seem confusing. In order for the Japanese to keep harmony and to balance many ideas, each must tolerate others, which means some parts must remain ambiguous. The Japanese feel comfortable in choosing and mixing the most suitable elements which they encounter. They practice the part they like from each ideology or religion and ignore what they think unsuitable. If ideas are in conflict, the Japanese get uncomfortable and confused, fearing that society will be chaotic. To achieve harmony is to be ambiguous. This is the way, unconsciously, most Japanese have been conducting their everyday life.

Typically, the Japanese try to be free from responsibility[62] which might cause conflict, ending their sentences saying "...*noyōdesu*" ～のようです (It seems that...), or "...*to omoimasu*" ～と思います (I think that...). To English speakers "That is right" is equivalent to the Japanese "*sonoyōdesu*" そのようです (It seems so), or "*sōdeshō*" そうでしょう (I presume so) or a statement, "*Watakushi no ichizon de wa kimekanemasu.*" 私の一存では決めかねます。 (It is hard to decide definitely with my own opinion alone).[63] When the Japanese speak, they protect their own feelings by wrapping their thought around many layers of ambiguity. In

[62] Itō, 225.

[63] Ibid.

this way, the Japanese think that they politely give room for listeners to avoid potentially conflicting ideas. Nevertheless, listeners who share the culture of speakers and grow up in the same environment usually detect and understand the speaker's intentional message. Since the Japanese have been communicating this way for a long time, for most Japanese it is an unconscious effort which is continuing a long held tradition in Japan. The concept of communal harmony and the overwhelming feeling of duty, both contribute to the unique ambiguity with which the Japanese communicate.

III. Established Thought and Unsaid Expression

How societal thought is expressed in language differs from one society to another. What follows examines how Japanese expression in their language reflects how the society thinks. This will explain one of the reasons why the Japanese language is perceived as an ambiguous language.

After Confucianism and Buddhism had come to Japan, there was hardly any further major foreign influence on the thought of the Japanese community until modern times. Foreigners were treated as special cases and were not received deeply into the community very often. Japanese society continued in its same form of existence for at least 13 centuries, from an early agricultural society until the present. Generations changed but the way they relate to each other has hardly changed. From generation to generation, the Japanese have lived by the same values. The values which were constructed early in the Japanese society find their foundation in individual responsibility, sensitiveness to others and harmonious community. The early Japanese learned through their experience to take responsibility not only for completing a task but also for satisfying the expectations of the other people involved. Yet the results of their interaction taught a form of self-protection through ambiguity and silence. Also, they learned to inhibit the sense of self-centeredness in order to be sensitive to other's expectations. On the

surface, the Japanese demonstrate this and, in return, they expect others to appreciate their selfless contribution to the society. This idea produced the attitude of catering to the majority's thought, decision and desires.[64] Araki states that the Japanese exist only for the community, not for the individual.[65] Furthermore, fulfilling the community's expectation of cooperation for harmony, resulted in a loss of distinction between self and others. [66]

As in many other communities, through the ages the Japanese have learned to anticipate the results of their actions, and accept the responsibility them. In most cases, the Japanese are conscious of the result because society revolves around traditional ideas. Even if a project succeeds, if the interpersonal relationships are not successful, most Japanese will regard themselves as having failed personally. The values the Japanese learned and have been exercising are such that, if one's action or statement leads to a wrong or bad ending, not only does one owe an apology to the society but also brings shame of a sort to the home and community to which he or she belongs. On the other hand, there is a certain element of understanding in the community. A recent example of this occurred on the Japanese political scene. The day before Prime Minister Hosokawa's resignation, a Diet member Shimomura Yasushi, apologized to the public through a television broadcast. He said that he

[64] Ibid.

[65] Araki, 30.

[66] Kō, 51.

regretted his thoughtlessness, for he should not have mentioned the Prime Minister's personal wish to resign.[67] Shimomura said further that if he wanted to make this statement, he should have more carefully considered what to say. Shimomura's action reflected a value of the society, the responsibility of his speech coinciding with the spirit of Kotodama. Shimomura apologized because he was ashamed of his irresponsibility and the results that his statement caused. The Japanese are afraid of being shamed. In addition, the Japanese are equally afraid of making their loved ones ashamed because of their actions. The Japanese know that people in their community will think of them and treat them and their family members a certain way if the result of their choice of action brings shame. Take this instance, a political incident, as an example. Shimomura established his reputation as an irresponsible speaker; therefore, people in the community associated him with his reputation. Furthermore, people in the community associated his family members with a related conclusion. The thinking of the people who deal this way with Shimomura's family is complicated. First, people are careful about what to say, because their saying might be mentioned the wrong way or at the wrong time and place. People also have to be sensitive not to hurt the feelings of Shimomura's family further by their own action, because people know that Shimomura's family know that people know what Shimomura did and Shimomura's family is ashamed of it.

Responding to this tradition now, the Japanese unconsciously

[67] Yomiuri Shinbun (the Yomiuri News), April 7, 1994.

protect themselves from the occurrence of such unexpected and undesirable results. The tools the Japanese choose in order to protect themselves are: keep silent, do not meddle in the personal matters of anyone who is involved and do not be explicit; that is, be ambiguous.

Here is an example of how the Japanese kept words more and more ambiguous. In feudal times, the hierarchy of society was precisely defined. In that society, if one suggested something contrary to that of the superior, it was often seen as a challenge and the person was punished and the family members were ashamed. Usually, one could not volunteer one's opinion unless one were consulted. Furthermore, even if one were consulted, one could not express a challenging opinion fully, because it still might hurt the feelings of the superior who might be self satisfied; therefore, one might be punished anyway. Experiences like this made the Japanese more aware of other members of society and made them more cautious. This resulted in their speaking more ambiguously. An accumulation of this type of experience formed the collective psyche of today's Japanese people. The Japanese continue a long tradition, automatically preserving harmony, even when they are dissatisfied. Therefore, they protect themselves while still disagreeing, use a minimum number of words and do not exhibit discontent. They do not confront directly.

After collecting and studying data on the comparative differences between Japanese and American communication Dean Barnlund argues, "The Japanese, fearful of the divisive potential of outright clashes of

opinion, appear to be among the most diligent of peoples in preventing such clashes from occurring."[68] Instead, the Japanese imply where they stand and expect others to understand why they are hesitating. This way of expressing themselves is confusing in the international community, since people from other cultures are not trained in the mechanisms of Japanese societal thought. The mechanism is that in regards to another's opinion, Japanese would not offer an opposing opinion. This mechanism is understood as a common logic in Japan and as the way people carry on their lives. Donald Keene and Shiba Ryōtarō state that the Japanese language is structured on the idea that being ambiguous is rather peaceful for both self and others.[69]

What the Japanese have learned from the past, and practice unconsciously now, is to adjust to everyone else, sacrificing individuality. Barnlund notes:

> There is continual reference to the search for harmony, the importance of form, the control of feeling, the cultivation of empathy, the sharing of mood, the observance of ritual, the search for consensus, the preservation of the whole.[70]

On April 7th, 1994, Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa resigned. In his resignation statement, Hosokawa apologized to the public and said that he had no choice but to leave in the middle of his term. Hosokawa begged

[68] Barnland, Public and Private Self in Japan and Uited States, 130.

[69] Shiba Ryōtarō and Donald Keene, Sekai no Naka no Nihon (Japan in the World) (Tokyo: Chūōkōronsha, 1992), 165.

[70] Barnland, Public and Private Self in Japan and Uited States, 166.

the public to understand. The explanation was that he, as head of state, has a responsibility to be a moral model. The personal economic matters that were being questioned should be his private affair and behind him. However, according to Hosokawa, personal or not, the public leader should not allow a personal problem to distract him from the decision making processes of his cabinet.[71] Hosokawa's ancestors were well known feudal lords. Hosokawa's belief fits right into the traditional mold. If Hosokawa's personal affairs interfere in policy-making, harmony cannot be preserved. He believed that the public expected him to resign and that was his responsibility. At the same time, Hosokawa expected the public to agree to his decision. This is a classic example of Japanese tradition. Moreover, Hosokawa followed the example of his grandfather, former Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro. Many Japanese people took Hosokawa's action to be honorable and said, "isagiyoi" いさぎよい (brave).[72] As noted above, when the Japanese cannot agree, they have learned to act honorably toward their society. The Japanese do not say anything which might hurt other people's feelings, because it brings discomfort to the community. Suzuki Takao explains that the Japanese do not actively make their information available nor even that the Japanese deliberately hold it back. [73]

[71] NHK TV News , April 7, 1994. See also The Yomiuri Shinbun April 9, 1994.

[72] NHK TV News , April 7, 1994.

[73] Suzuki Takao, "The case for Spreading the Japanese Language," Japan Echo, Winter 1992, 80.

The Japanese avoid both direct questions and direct answers as much as possible, as Barnlund observes: "The underlying dialectic in Japanese social relationship appears to favor preservation of a delicate rapport among the members of a collective rather than a confrontation."[74] There was, for example, a famous trial in the late Edo period. The scholars who were accused said nothing during the trial. Later, the authorities found them innocent, but imprisoned one of them anyway, for his silence was taken as an insult. In any community in the world, a person keeping silent to questions by the authorities, is held to be ignoring the authority. This is taken as a heavy insult in Japan. Consequently, in spite of being found not guilty, they were told that they had criticized the policy and were unmannered. Since one of the scholars, Watanabe Kazan was a statesman, he was pardoned. But another, Kōno Chōei, was imprisoned for life. [75] Nevertheless, for this scholar, silence was a harmonious solution for his family, his scholastic community and the government at that time. If society as a whole respected the traditional way of this scholar's attitude, his action would be accepted and considered honorable. If the scholar's family knew that he was true to his traditions, they could feel comforted rather than shamed. He sacrificed himself for the harmony of the whole and the feelings of the community.

What is in the back of the Japanese mind is how others, whom they relate to in the community, will think and feel about them if they say or

[74] Barnland, Public and Private Self in Japan and Uited States, 60.

[75] "Mokushite kotaezu" (Silence without answer), Kaizō, July 1952, 26.

do something. In fact, the Japanese say "*minna ga dō omouka*" 皆がどう思うか (How does everybody think [about their action and the result]?). The verb "*omou*" is a popular word the Japanese use frequently, meaning something like "think with one's heart." *Omou* is an action and feeling of thought by experience. When the Japanese say, "I think ...," in English, it usually means "I feel ...." The word "*omou*" is rather emotional than mental, compared to another word meaning to think, "*kangaeru*." What other people think or feel about what has been said is a concern of the speaker. Trying not to spoil any relationship is another concern. The Japanese avoid a situation that might bring them a responsibility that they are not willing to undertake.

In many cases, the reason the Japanese say what they say is that they anticipate what others are expecting them to say. Again Kiyoshi Seika, in describing the other-oriented character of Japanese behavior, put it more succinctly. "He does what he is expected to do. He says what he is expected to say. He abides by an intricate code of etiquette."[76] Japanese individuals learn from society and blend into that society. Their interdependency is uniform. They help each other and do not harm each other. On the other hand, each individual Japanese expects not to be hurt by others. In addition, each individual Japanese expects that his or her family's feelings will not be hurt by others. For example, and continuing the story from the previous chapter about two sets of parents of a couple

[76] As quoted in Barnland, Public and Private Self in Japan and United States, 59, 60.

from Japan who live in California, after the parents of the husband made a visit to California from Japan, the parents of the wife could now visit their daughter. Her family enjoyed the visit, taking countless photographs for good memories. The parents of the wife did not feel guilty about visiting their daughter, because in their minds, they had waited their turn. They kept up with the manners and rules of the traditional community. But the unique Japanese characteristic appeared again after they went home to Japan. That is, the parents of the wife felt obliged to report their visit to the husband's parents and wanted to show them photos and share stories of their visit with the husband's parents. This may be normal. But the unique and sensitive part of the wife's parents' minds reminded them that they could not share the photos which showed them having a good time and possibly a better time than the husband's parents had.[77] The precaution is not to make any waves. The wife's parents avoided any chance that the husband's parents might feel left out. The wife's parents paid their respects to the husband's parents as the husband's parents were expecting and thus appreciated the sensitive presentation by the other couple. The wife's parents fulfilled the traditional obligation according to common logic among the Japanese.

When the Japanese are trying to protect themselves, they choose words carefully, but when they are not, they expect others to think just like them. So they talk carelessly compared to when they are protecting themselves. They abbreviate details and expect others to understand

[77] The persons referred to are friends of the author.

exactly what they are saying. This common trait of the Japanese community brings problems in the international community. In many cases, the Japanese unconsciously misjudge, thinking that the others know what was meant because they are accustomed to communicating that way. But people of another culture, who do not have the same experience as the Japanese, may not have any idea what was meant and it is confusing. When the Japanese hear hesitation or silence, they automatically sense disagreement.[78] But for people from other cultures, the reality is different. Toyama Shigehiko gives an example. A person came to see the president of a company to seek a donation for a cause. The president replied "*kangae tokimashō*" 考えときましょう (I'll think about it). The president was refusing by implication. A few days later, the person returned and asked the president, "*mō kangaete kudasaimashitaka*" もう考えてくださいましたか (Have you thought about it, yet?). The president laughed and said "*sonna koto mo wakaranaide yoku ichininmae no kao o shite irareru ne*" そんなことも わからなくて よく一人前の顔をしていられるね (My how you can pretend not to know such an ordinary thing!)"[79] The president still did not say "no." The first reply by the president, "I'll think about it," could be the universal reply, but the second reply, "How can you...," instead of "no," is typical of Japanese society. People from some other culture would not recognize

[78] Nomoto Kikuo, Nihonjin to Nihongo (The Japanese and Japanese) (Tokyo: Tsukuba Shobō, 1978), 82.

[79] Toyama Shigehiko, Eigo no hassō, Nihongo no Hassō (English Expression, Japanese Expression) 5th ed.(Tokyo: Nihon Hōsō Shuppan Kyōkai, 1993), 19.

disagreement unless they heard the disagreement clearly and directly. When people from other cultures hear the ambiguous hesitating Japanese statement, it might take them time to figure out what the Japanese are saying, even though the Japanese only speak ambiguously to avoid conflict.[80] While they are thinking, they might not smile like the Japanese do. But not smiling does not mean that they disagree, although the Japanese would think it does. When the Japanese conduct business, they talk with controlled language expression. The controlled expression varies depending on the seniority or respectability of the responders. In the Japanese language, there are different sets of polite words to choose from depending on the status of the others. Barnlund describes it thus:

> A member of Japanese society is always surrounded by superiors and subordinates, and the presence of either modifies the way he must phrase his views. At the outset, the relative status of each communicant must be known. The choice of words, the selection of prefixes, the proper form of verbs turns on the status and respect accorded the listener.[81]

In Japan, both sides of the communication know how polite or humble they must be and choose wording accordingly. An article in March 1984 issue of Shokun reviewing a book Keigo Nihonjin Ron (A Discussion of Japaneseness in Honorific Language) by Araki Hiroyuki explains the use of Japanese honorific language: consideration of others by emptying oneself (repressing one's own desires) exists at the root of

[80] Nomoto, 33.

[81] Barnlund, Public and Private Self in Japan and Uited States, 134.

Japanese honorific terms.[82] Both parties expect each other to choose the right words. This expectation comes automatically from childhood training. This tradition of expectation is deeply rooted in the community not only in the form of verbalization but also in custom as a whole.

A historical incident exemplifies the honorific system in the society. Morita Yasunosuke reports that since the disastrous fire in 1657, Edo, the old Tokyo, was visited by great fires often. The Tokugawa Shogun's government developed a countermeasure. The shogunate ordered the use of tiled roofs and built fire refuges (shelters). Something like today's city planning was promoted seriously by the shogunate. About that time, if retailers had fires, wholesalers sent merchandise right away to the retailers without regard for credit, so that retailers could continue their business without worries. The wholesalers assisted the retailer's recovery. On the other hand, when fire struck the wholesalers, the retailers said, "Our sources are in trouble," and gathered the amount of their debts to pay and assisted in the quick recovery of their wholesaler. There was a beautiful balance of trust among people. Morita concludes, "Should not we appreciate it?" [83]

In addition to the level of politeness with which the Japanese communicate, they consider the thoughts of others. It is a listener-

[82] "Shindokusai no shindoku nōto" (A bedside reading note by Shindokusai), Shokun, March 1984, 177.

[83] Morita Yasunosuke, "Yamatogokoro no genryū o tazunete, jōmin no kokoro to nihonjin" (Searching for the origin of the Japanese spirit, the heart of ordinary people and the Japanese), Nihon oyobi nihonjin, Fall 1968, 114.

oriented communication. Yamashita Hideo states that when a speaker thinks about the listener's standpoint, the speaker does not consider himself or herself. The listener also ignores his or her own opinion and follows the speaker's mind by watching and listening to what the speaker is trying to say.[84] The Japanese talk and respond the way others expect because they are sensitive to other's expectations. Akamatsu Hiroshi indicates that in the case of the Japanese language, the actual condition of the addressee and the verbal form of the speaker's expression are always interlocking. In a word, an answer comes out in a form of layered negotiation of hidden meaning. It is at the heart of the matter that the Japanese always steps into the partner's suggested world.[85]

In addition to being polite and engaging in listener-centered communication, the Japanese skip mentioning the topic of conversation once it is established.

> To the extent a conversational interactant believes (correctly or incorrectly) that the partner can understand a truncated or obscured reference, the interactant uses such forms freely. This means, of course, that an interactant could make reference to an individual on the first mentioning with ellipsis. In fact, this is a commonplace in conversational interaction, especially among intimates. It occurs even among strangers in the case of first and second person referencing, since by virtue of their physical presence in the nonlinguistic environment, speakers and addressees achieve saliency.[86]

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[84] Yamashita Hideo, Nihon no Kotoba to Kokoro (Japanese Language and Spirit) (Tokyo : Kōdansha, 1979), 16.

[85] Akamatsu Hiroshi, "Nihongo kara nihonjin o kangaeru" (Thinking about the Japanese through the Japanese Language), Ryūdō, Feb. 1973, 144.

[86] John Hind, "Topic Maintenance in Japanese Narratives and Japanese Conversational Interaction," Discourse Processes, Oct-Dec. 1984, 470.

In addition to skipping topics, Japanese nonverbal responses confuse participants from outside the community. The study of nonverbalized response by Sheida White shows that the Japanese respond to speakers more frequently than Americans.

> ... [A]izuchi (backchannels) are very frequent in Japanese conversations as well. When Japanese listen in a Japanese conversation, ... non-Japanese speakers become disturbed by the frequent responses of the Japanese listeners and fail to understand their meaning. [87]

One of the favorite methods of response for the Japanese is nodding. People from other cultural communities mistake the Japanese nodding as agreement; but for the Japanese, nodding only indicates their understanding of the speaker's mind and does not mean that they are agreeing. Nodding, to the Japanese mind, is a friendly gesture which indicates honoring and accepting others humanistically. Nomoto Kikuo remarks that it is clear that language is for understanding each other, but language is not the only one way to do that. There are many other elements in understanding. In the character of Japanese communication, the importance of those other elements is high in relation to language. [88]

To be open to harmony, to repress one's own ideas for others, to be always humble and polite, to preserve the peace of the society, are the traditional forms of societal thought in Japan. To adjust one's will to

[87] Sheida White, "Backchannels across cultures: a study of Americans and Japanese," Language in Society, March 1989, 60.

[88] Nomoto, 79, 80. See also Barnlund, Nihonjin no Hyōgenkōzō, 107.

societal expectation is the form of communication the Japanese practice.

Generations of experience in communal interaction taught the Japanese the values reflected in their life style and developed the way they respond. Within the Japanese community, the values are set in everyone's mind and the Japanese comprehend the process going through another person's mind without verbal communication. This is only because there was little influence mixed into Japanese culture for very long periods of time. The Japanese who have grown up in Japan think alike. Besides this, the majority of Japanese who have grown up in Japan rarely learn of people in other cultures who think differently. Therefore, ordinary Japanese are not sensitive to other ways of thinking. The Japanese can complicate their statement with the expression "... to omowareru," ～と思われる (It may be felt that ...) or "*...to ittemo yoi no dewanai ka to omowareru,*" ～と言っても良いのではにかと思われる。(One might feel [from the heart] that it would be all right to say that...). Suzuki Takao explains that the substance of a statement is shaded by using ambiguous expressions within a passage. So one says, "one might think that...," or "Would it be all right to think that...." [89]

Since there are few contradictory interpretations within the community, the Japanese do not have to debate about how they think. Everyone understands the basic thought of the community. Because the Japanese homogeneous community established uniform thinking and

[89] Suzuki Takao, Tozasareta Gengo. Nihongo no Sekai (A Language Enclosed. The World of Japanese), (Tokyo : Shinchōsha, 1975), 25.

since the Japanese were trained to be harmonious and preferred to be less talkative, they were not trained to debate with their own opinion. Because the Japanese were not taught how different people think, they cannot compare differences among the thinking of other cultures. Makino Seiichi writes that in the case of the Japanese, the problem of the language is that it is not analyzed well enough to be understood. The rules which are located deep inside of the Japanese unconscious need to be pulled out.[90] The problem is not just the language but the subliminal cultural expectations, honorific constraints and nonverbal means of communication which make up the whole. Therefore, the Japanese have difficulty expressing their standpoint in the world community. Instead, instinctively the Japanese react to the international community by using their well practiced habit of harmonious thoughts, being less talkative, and more allusive, all with a friendly smile.

Even now, ordinary Japanese live their life in the community which carries their tradition. In the traditional community the Japanese could depend on others to know what they want without speaking. Gregory Clark and Yamamoto Shichihei note that the Japanese language, as is true of the culture, does not have any skill of self expression. It does not have the capability to express one's self. For a long time, it was not necessary for the Japanese to express, explain, debate or negotiate anything. People in the society understood each other. Before Suzuki Zenkō, Minister of

[90] Makino Seiichi, "Nihonbunka no kīwādo o motomete" (Searching for the key words of Japanese culture), Chishiki, August 1986, 292.

Agriculture and Forestry, left for negotiations in Moscow, he said "*hara o watte hanaseba aite mo rikai shite kureru*" ハラを割って話せば相手も理解してくれる (if I speak the truth, it will be understood). He meant that talk without hiding anything will be understood. Clark and Yamamoto continue that it is not possible for foreigners to negotiate diplomacy in this kind of frame of mind.[91] The statement exaggerates; however, it explains a mode of typical Japanese character. "*Hara o waru*" means literally "split one's stomach," which is translated into the idiomatic expression "to tell the truth" or "talk without hiding anything," because in the Japanese mind, "split one's stomach" relates to the meaning of "display all that is in one's mind." In the community, the Japanese negotiate by hinting their wishes.

In other words, they keep silence not only about disagreement but also about specifying their desires clearly. Insisting on personal wishes is also taken as frivolous within the communal logic. The Japanese do not know what they are hiding, because inhibiting oneself is an unconscious effort for them. Because they helped and depended on each other for a long time, the Japanese got by without expressing themselves much. Araki explains that the production of food depends heavily on this definite requirement of cooperation and mutual understanding. Personal will was not allowed in communication. Araki adds further that it is natural to

[91] Gregory Clark and Yamamoto Shichihei, "'Nihonjin ron ketteiban, motto jibunjishin o shirutame ni tettei shiyō" (Japaneseness, The Final Word: Know Oneself More Throughly), Shūkan Asahi, May 2, 1977, 137.

erase human ego in the interdependent community.[92] Because of the interrelated, interdependent system in traditional life the existence or consciousness of the individual Japanese was hidden. Furthermore, differentiating between one's self and others was not considered in some cases. Kō indicates that self and community are assimilated in a peculiar individual. In the field of Japanese thought and vision, existence of others with relation to the existence of oneself is likely missing.[93] In Japan, society rewards the person who fits in, not the person with strong character. Persons who are desired in Japan are persons who can relate well to the economic community, and within companies, and who are not persons who have individuality.[94] It will take some time to alter tradition and bring out individuality in the Japanese. Today, when one Japanese speaks on the international scene, chances are that people from other cultures hear the thoughts of the community of Japan, in a manner of speaking, not the thoughts of an individual.

Thoughts cannot be expressed without the use of language in any community. Doi Takeo suggests that it is impossible for humans to express thoughts without language, but the true quality of thoughts is preeminent over language.[95] However, some communities use language

[92] Araki, 30.

[93] Kō, 51.

[94] "Nippon hyōbanki" (Notes on things popular in Japan), Ushio, March 1982, 271.

[95] Doi Takeo, 'Amae' no Kōzō (The Structure Of "Amae") (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1992), 73.

to cover wider areas of thoughts than others. The reasons for the Barnlund observation that the Japanese communicate quietly, carefully and less personally, are due to the Japanese tradition of discouraging talkative people, silencing disagreement, examining words and being responsible for communal harmony. In Japan the use of language to express thoughts is very limited. In Japan the relationship of language to the totality of communication is merely the tip of the iceberg.

IV. Language and Societal Thought.

As society formed its rules of how to express its thought, the language adjusted the rules to fit into the societal need for this expression. Those rules for societal expression and linguistic norms coincide in a particular society. Some of the syntax rules of Japanese allow the listener to infer an ambiguous expression and some other Japanese syntax rules which are not similar to another language, make translation difficult. This chapter is about the Japanese language and shows one of the reasons why the Japanese communicate through ambiguous expressions.

Japanese societal thought is reflected in Japanese language. The fundamental rules of language and attitude toward the expression must have developed at a time when the Japanese culture and society were forming.

An overview of ancient Japan indicates that Japanese culture was formed by the fusion of a variety of cultures. Many groups of people came from Asia and the South Pacific.[96] One by one, they brought their cultural influences which flowed into the main stream of culture like many little streams joining a larger river which could trace itself back to a

[96] Tanikawa Kenichi and Kinu Tarusu, Kodai Nihon Bunka no Genryū (The Source of the Ancient Culture of Japane) (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō, 1986), 57.

small original spring. For instance, sometime around 300 BC the group of people who brought wet rice culture came from Southern China[97] and also brought the Burmese vocabulary, especially botanical words which have to do with rice.[98] The silk worms that Japanese treasure find their ancestry in the Yangtze Valley of China[99] where the Six Dynasties flourished. Until the last century, fishermen wore grass skirts in the Polynesian fashion.[100] As time went by, these influences were adapted and adjusted into one uniform culture. One unique culture was formed, and it is manifested in the Japanese character. [101]

The formation of the Japanese language went through a similar process at the same time.[102] According to Yasumoto Biten the idea of "the origin of the Japanese language materialized" not from "a systematized idea," but from "the idea of inflow."[103] The Indo-European languages

[97] Shiba Ryōtarō, Ueda Masaaki and Kimu Tarusu, Nihon no Dorai Bunka (The Imported Culture of Japan). (Tokyo: Chūōkōronsha, 1991), 16. See also Furukawa Kiyoyuki, Sūpā Nihonshi (Super Japnese History) (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1993), 24.

[98] Yasumoto Biten, Nihongo no Kigen o Saguru (Searching for the origin of Japanese). (Tokyo: PHP Kenkyūjo, 1985), 163.

[99] Yamamoto, 41.

[100] Tanikawa and Kimu, 159.

[101] Yasumoto, Nihongo, 168.

[102] Kawamoto Takao, Minami kara Kita Nihongo (Japanese that came from the south) (Tokyo: Sanseido, 1978), 260. See also Murayama Shichirō, Nihongo no Kigen to Gogen (Origin and Etymology of Japanese) (Tokyo: San'ichi Shobō, 1988), 187, 279. See also Ikeda and Ōno, 307-319.

[103] Yasumoto Biten, " Nihonjin no genryū, fukusū no ishitsu na gengo ga nagarekomu" (The Origin of the Japanese, Varieties of Foreign Languages Stream In), Kagaku Asahi, Feb. 1988, 21.

developed from one origin, but the Japanese language materialized through the inflow of many languages.[104] Linguists who observe how the language of a particular community is changing at present, and how the same language has changed in the past discovered that the European languages originated from a proto Indo-European language. Many languages presently spoken in Western and Eastern countries, including India and regions around it, are related at their root. English is one of the languages which traces its root to West Germanic which traces its ancestry to proto-Germanic and eventually to one root: the Proto Indo-European language.

> The common source of Latin, Greek, Sanskrit, Celtic, Gothic, Persian, and many other languages (including English and its Germanic relatives, and French and Spanish and their Romance relatives) is Proto-Indo-European. A parent language and the daughter languages that have developed from it are collectively referred to as a language family. While there are no written records of Proto-Indo-European itself, a rich vein of information about its words and structures can be deciphered from the linguistic characteristics of its daughter languages.[105]

So, English is a language which branched out from its roots with other languages. On the other hand the Japanese language developed by adopting many languages as each of them was brought in by groups of people who migrated from other regions of the world to Japan. Kawamoto Takao describes Japanese as the language of multiple layers or

[104] Ibid.

[105] Edward Finegan and Niko Besnier, Language: Its Structure and Use (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989), 280.

multiple mixtures of Austronesian, Uralic, Korean and Ainu.[106] Edward Finegan and Niko Besnier describe Japanese:

> ... Japanese [does] not have any relatives. The genetic isolation of these languages has been the subject of much speculation by fertile imaginations that have tried to link them to just about every language family. Many hypotheses, most unfounded, have been advanced linking Korean or Japanese to Austronesian, Dravidian, Hungarian, Basque, and Ancient Egyptian, as well as to certain combinations of these.[107]

In other words, the Japanese language finds parts of many languages in its roots. For any language in the world, once the language is formed, the basic rules of the language are set and preserved in its particular community. The most basic rule of language is its structure. Generally it is thought that the basic sentence is the combination of subject and predicate, which consist of object and verb. The order of these three elements differ from language to language. English and its related languages usually use subject, verb, and object order in a sentence, where other languages, such as Japanese in general use a subject, object, verb order. Kindaichi Haruhiko writes about the character of the Japanese language, "words which express the fundamental nature of a sentence come at the very end of a sentence as a rule."[108] Linguists describe the place of the important word in the sentence as "word initial" for English and "word final" for Japanese. Some

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[106] Kawamoto, 260.

[107] Finegan and Besnier, 307.

[108] Kindaichi Haruhiko, The Japanese Language, translated and annotated by Umeyo Hirano (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1978), 224.

examples of "word final" in Japanese discussed here are negation, question and the noun phrase. The "word final" rule is one in which a sentence or phrase ends with the most important word, such as a verb. Negation and questions come at the end of the sentence. And the head noun ends at the final place in noun phrase. For an example of the verb final, the English sentence "I eat a slice of bread," is composed of a subject "I", a verb "eat", and an object "a slice of bread." The equivalent sentence in Japanese is "*watakushi ga pan o taberu*." 私がパンを食べる。 The subject is "*watakushi*" (I), the object is "*pan*" (bread), the verb is "*taberu*" (eat). Since the verb carries the basic meaning of the sentence, this explains why the Japanese sentence is not clear until the very last word. Therefore, the longer the sentence the more confused and vague it get

The noun phrase in Japanese is another structure in which the main idea does not show up until the end. If the English say "the place where I went on vacation," the Japanese would say "*kyūka de itta tokoro*." 休暇で行った所。 The Japanese noun "*tokoro*" is equivalent to the English "place." In English the listener would know that the speaker is going to talk about the place right away, where in Japanese the listener would find out that the speaker is talking about the place at the end of the phrase. Besides, in English, the speaker clarifies that he or she is going to talk about "the place" placing the relative pronoun "where" after the noun "place."

Negation is another example of Kindaichi's rule. Toyama describes that in Japanese, the negation sentence is not negated until the last

word.[109] For example, the English "I do not eat a slice of bread," the Japanese "*pan o tabemasen.*" パンを食べません。 A negation of the verb "*tabemasu*" is "*tabemasen*" in Japanese.

The interrogative sentence shows another "word final" example in Japanese. An English sentence "Do you eat a slice of bread?" is Japanese "pan o tabemasu ka." パンを食べますか。 In other words, the Japanese sentences place an interrogative marker "*ka*" at the end of the regular sentence. In this sentence an equivalent word to the English "you" is omitted as it is communally understood. Usually in English, if a sentence is an interrogative sentence, a verb has to relocate to the front of a subject to indicate that what is being said is a question. In contrast, Japanese does not relocate the verb for an interrogative sentence. Instead Japanese add "*ka*" at the end of the regular statement to indicate a question. Since there is no indication of a question until the very end of the sentence, the longer the sentence the more confusing it gets especially if the sentence is a negative question with many noun phrases in it.

Along with the "word final" rule, deletion is another rule which caters to ambiguous expression. Even though the Japanese equivalent to the English sentence "I eat a slice of bread" is "*watakushi ga pan o taberu,*" when the Japanese communicate, the subject "*watakushi*" and its marker "*ga*" are commonly abbreviated. Both communicators instantly recognize that the subject of the sentence is the speaker. In many cases if

[109] Toyama, 38.

the speaker mentions the subject, it sounds awkward to Japanese, and seems redundant. In addition, once the topic of conversation is set, the topic will not be mentioned. White explains, "in Japanese once a person is introduced as the topic, and as long as there is no change in the discourse topic, there is no need to reintroduce the topic."[110] So, the Japanese sentence is actually "*pan o taberu.*" The only way the Japanese understand the sentence means "I eat bread" instead of "Bread eat something" is by using the proper object marker "*o.*" Once "*o*" is placed in the sentence, a noun preceding the particle "*o*" is the object. But if the object ("bread") were discussed prior to the sentence, the Japanese can communicate without an object. So, a Japanese would say "*watakushi ga taberu.*" (I eat) In this fundamental sentence, the Japanese can communicate either an abbreviated subject or an object depending on what was previously discussed. However, in special cases, the Japanese even avoid verbs, leaving the listener or reader to draw his or her own inference. An example in which the verb is understood and not mentioned follows. There is a proverb *"mitsugo no tamashii wa hyaku made."* 三つ子の魂は百まで (A three-year-old child's spirit will not change for the rest of his or her life). In the proverb, "will not change" is left out.[111] Another example of a verb to be inferred is when a mother in-law starts to serve tea, she might say "*watakushi ga...*" (I ...) and the others will assume "will do it." With a rule of "word final" and a custom of

[110] White, 60.

[111] Kindaichi, 274.

deletion of components, Japanese sentences create ambiguity even among Japanese. According to Makino, the abbreviation of the Japanese language relates to the thought that there is no distinction between self and other.[112] For a listener to understand the exact thought of a speaker, where the speaker is abbreviating, the listener's mind must be one with the speaker's. Non-distinction between others and self is seen in following example, although this is a reflection of the thought process rather than a syntax argument. Toyama writes that when he spoke to a little boy named Kazuhiko[113] saying "*boku* (I)...," Kazuhiko asked Toyama "Who is *boku*?"[114] *Boku* is a first person pronoun for a Japanese male. Usually young boys say "*boku*" for the English "I." So, Toyama, referring to himself, applied the boy's language to be friendly. However, it is common in Japan that a little boy is called "*boku*" instead of using his first name. Therefore, Kazuhiko thought that Toyama was talking about Kazuhiko. An English speaking mother would say, "Kazuhiko wants to eat broccoli," or "Kazuhiko is going to bed now." A Japanese mother says, "*boku* wants to eat broccoli," or "*boku* is going to bed now" if she is suggesting to Kazuhiko to do something. Japanese speak for little boys using a word "boku," so that each little boy associates this with himself. Therefore, when Toyama said "*boku* ...," Kazuhiko was confused.

[112] Makino, 292.

[113] Kazuhiko is a fictitious name the author chose for convenience for explanation.

[114] Toyama Shigehiko, Kosodate wa kotoba no kyoikū kara (Raising a child begins with language education) (Tokyo: PHP Kenkyūjo, 1993), 67.

Barnlund in describing the Japanese language writes:

> Japanese is a more ambiguous and more evocative language than English. Sentences are not as closed with respect to meanings, encouraging listeners to consider a multiplicity of interpretations. There is less precise identification of referents. Article, number and gender are not specified. The representation of time is less complex. The subject of a sentence is often unstated, carried by implication rather than explication. A sentence fragment or phrase will often suggest rather than describe an event.[115]

The same sentence "*watakushi ga pan o taberu*" can be used to explain Burnland's statement further. The English word order is conventionally structured. In contrast, the Japanese word order is not rigid as long as it ends with a verb. Kuno Susumu notes that Japanese has a fairly extensive scrambling rule.[116] Therefore, the Japanese could say, "*pan o watakushi ga taberu*" – object, subject, and verb order – for the same sentence. In English the function of words are determined by the order of the words. In Japanese, the function of the words is determined by the function of particles, such as *"ga"* and "*o*" in the sentence. Therefore, word order is not the key factor to understand which word is subject and which is object in Japanese. Japanese language structure is determined by the particle rather than the word order, and how the word order is arranged reflects the speaker's emphasis. According to Yamashita Hideo, the Japanese structure is characterized by dependence on particles rather than word order; therefore, the assertion

[115] Barnlund, Public and Private Self in Japan and Uited States, 132.

[116] Kuno Susumu, The Structure of the Japanese Language (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1973), 351.

of the speaker is reflected by the particle.[117] In addition, Japanese "*ichimai no*," which is equivalent to "a slice of" in English, is void in a usual Japanese sentence, unless "a slice" is the emphasis of the sentence. Singular or plural is not important in the Japanese language as Barnlund has mentioned.

Another possible phrasing of sentences is to replace the particle "*ga*," the subject marker, with another particle "*wa*," the topic marker. "*Watakushi ga pan o taberu*" and "*watakushi wa pan o taberu*" are translated into the same English sentence "I eat (a slice of) bread." But in the Japanese mind, "*watakushi ga*" means "the person who eats bread is me" and "*watakushi wa*" means "what I do is to eat bread."

A example of the differences between cultures and the structure of language is the following. When a child is practicing the piano, the mother of the child might ask her friend "not to listen." An English speaker would say, "Don't listen to her," while a Japanese speaker would say, "*piano o kikanaide*" ピアノを聞かないで, which means, "Don't listen to the piano." The English speaker meant, "Do not listen to the child who is playing the piano," and the Japanese speaker meant, "Do not listen to the piano that the child is playing." Both the English speaker and the Japanese mean that they do not want anyone to hear the piano practice of the child. However, the objects are different in the two languages. The object of the English sentence is "the child", and of the Japanese sentence "piano." "Child," the object of the English sentence, is actually the subject

[117] Yamashita, 17.

of its subordinate clause, "... who is playing piano. " "Piano," the object of a Japanese sentence, is the object of its subordinate clause, "...that the child is playing." The two languages display differences in thought in these sentences. The English represents the subject of the subordinate sentence as an object. The Japanese represent the object of the subordinate sentence as an object, leaving the listener to interpret the subject. The sentence structure of the Japanese language coincides with Japanese thought by leaving the main part (subject) of an idea for the listener to interpret to his or her liking.

The following sentence further confirms that Japanese sentence structure reflects societal thought. A Japanese mother asking a child to listen, would say "*yoku kikinasai.*" 良く聞きなさい。 The Japanese word "*yoku*" is an adverb meaning "well," and "*kikinasai*" is the imperative form of the verb "to listen." So "*yoku kikinasai*" would translate into "Listen well" in English. The Japanese child infers from this that the mother expects him to understand the content of her words. Moreover, the child is not hearing this verbalization as "Listen to me." An English speaking child would infer, "Listen to me who is talking." As we discussed in previous chapters, Japanese communication style is based on the listener's thoughts. What the mother wants her child to hear is not the who, but the content of what she is saying. The Japanese avoid self-centered communication because society will not accept it. The structure of the language goes along with this idea.

Following are some examples of the Japanese linguistic functions

which differ from English. A question in Japanese "*Rondon wa furui machi de, yūmeina tatemono ga takusan arimasu ka.*" ロンドンは古い町で有名な建物がたくさんありますか sounds natural to any Japanese. But the direct translation of this sentence in English would literally be "Is London an old town and are there many famous buildings ?" English speakers would say "Is London an old town and does it have many famous buildings?" In the English speakers' mind, these are two separate questions. Therefore, they say two separate clauses joined by the conjunction "and." The same questions in the Japanese speaker's mind, are two continuous thoughts. Therefore, they say one sentence with two elements which are tied together by the "te-form" as "*furui machi de.*"[118] In English, "Is London an old town?," has a verb "is" and another sentence, "Does it have many famous buildings?," which contains an auxiliary verb "does." Since "is" and "does" would not work together in one clause, there must be two clauses. Each sentence contains either one or the other verb. This particular Japanese sentence could be translated into one English sentence using a preposition "with" as, "Is London an old town with many famous buildings?" In this sentence, the preposition "with" takes the place of Japanese "te-form."

The Japanese language structure allows the "te-form" of a verb or adjective" to tie different thoughts into one sentence. Since the "te-form" can combine many thoughts together into one sentence, the Japanese use of conjunctions like "and" or "with" as the above case is minimized. In

[118] "de" is the te-form of the auxiliary verb "desu."

other words, several sentences in English could be one sentence in Japanese. Continuing many thoughts is one of many functions the "te-form" has.

The following is an example of a Japanese sentence using the "te-form." "*Kaigi ga daradara tsuzuite tsumaranakatta no de soto e deta totan subette koronde ashi ga okashikunatta no de byōin e itte isha ni mite morattara nenza shita to wakatte itakute sonomama ie ni kaette ashikubi o hiyashite ima yasunde imasu.*" 会議がダラダラつずいて つまらなかったので外へ出たとたん すべってころんで 足がおかしくなったので 病院へ行って医者に診てもらったら 捻挫したと判って痛くて そのまま家に帰って 足首を冷やして 今休んでいます。 A translation of this might be, " The meeting was long and unproductive. Since I was bored [or the meeting was uninteresting], I went outside. As soon as I came out I slipped and fell. Since my leg felt strange [or abnormal] I went to the hospital. After a doctor diagnosed me, I found out that I had sprained my ankle. It was hurting, so I came home and iced it and now I am resting." In this English translation, there are six sentences. There could be fewer sentences with a combination using conjunctions and prepositions. But Japanese combines all of them together into one, using twelve verbs and adjectives with the "te-form." The "te-form" requires the addressee to interpret each case into the right circumstances. Note how many "I"s are used in this English version, while there is not a single "*watakushi*," equivalent to the English "I," used in Japanese. So, if this Japanese sentence ends with negation and question, the whole sentence ends with

the English translation "Aren't you resting?"

Let us return to the sentence "Is London an old town, and does it have many famous buildings?" If communication reflects differences in customs and thoughts behind them, English marks the question at the beginning of the sentence and as previously discussed, Japanese marks the question at its end. Moreover, the choice of verbs in these two languages explains differences in the speakers' minds. The English sentence chose the verb "have," where the Japanese sentence chose "*aru*" which means to exist. The Japanese speaker is concerned with the existence of the material whereas the English speaker often relates the same thought as possession by the subject. An English speaker will say "Do you have money?" while the Japanese would say "*okane ga arimasuka*"お金がありますか。 (Does money exist?)

Another Japanese linguistic function which differs from English is the function of the particle "*no*." As in the "te-form" the relational particle "*no*" ties several thoughts into one sentences. This "*no*" is called a genitive case marker because "*no*" describes a "one" which belongs to "the other." For example, an English phrase "An American car" is "*Amerika no kuruma* (car)" アメリカの車 in Japanese; or in English, "National parks of the U.S." is "*Amerika no kokuritsu kōen*"アメリカの国立公園 (national park) in Japanese. The function of "*no*" is to connect nouns or noun phrases. The later noun is like a head noun and belongs or relates to the previous noun. "*No*" transformed into a variety of prepositions and other meanings in English. For example, the announcer of a Japanese television

news broadcast was talking about the first sign of spring in Northern Japan when the snow began to melt. Snow melts first by the highway where the deer come to look for new sprouts of grass to eat. Instead of finding food near the highways, the deer were hit by automobiles, which caused danger to both the deer population and the drivers. The announcer concluded her report by saying "*Ezojika ni totte mo untenshu ni totte mo yōchūi no haru no otozure desu.*" エゾ鹿にとっても運転手にとっても要注意の春の訪れです。 This conclusion translates into English as "For *Ezo* deer and for drivers, the beginning of spring (is here, but it) requires caution," or "The beginning of spring means warning for drivers," or "(Since) spring began, drivers need to pay attention." The sentence breaks down into: *Ezojika ni totte mo* – as for both *Ezo* deer, *untenshu ni totte mo* – and for drivers, *yō* – requirement or necessity, *chūi* – caution or careful, *haru* – spring, *otozure* – visit. This section "*yō chūi no haru no otozure*" sounds poetic and totally understandable in Japan. The second "*no*" is simply connecting "spring" and "visit," like the English preposition "of" or "by". But the first "*no*" is vague. The announcer is emphasizing that the beginning of spring is here and she is trying to convey the message that drivers need to be careful. Just as the "te-form" of verbs and adjectives can gather many thoughts into one sentence, the relational particle "no" connects many nouns and noun phrases together to convey many thoughts at once.

Another example of conveying many thought in one sentence is by adding relative clauses in an agglutinative process. Let us borrow the

example sentence of Kuno, "John *ga katte-iru neko ga koroshita nezumi ga tabeta chiizu wa kusatte-ita*."[119] Analysis of this sentence reveals that the last compound words "*kusatte-ita*" (was rotten) is a verb. A word next to the last "*chīzu*" (cheese) is the head noun. All the other words compose three relative clauses which modify the group behind each clause. "*Tabeta*" (ate) modifies "*chīzu*" and together make up a noun phrase. "*Nezumi*" (rat) is the subject in the clause "*nezumi ga tabeta chīzu.*" (cheese which a rat ate). "*Koroshita*" (killed) is a verb which modifies "*nezumi.*" "*Neko*" (cat) is the subject in the clause "*neko ga koroshita nezumi.*" (a rat which a cat killed). "*Katte-iru*" (keeps) is a compound verb which modifies "*neko.*" "John" is a subject in a clause "John *ga katte-iru neko.*" (a cat which John keeps). Kuno explains that relative clauses precede the head nouns in Japanese. This feature of Japanese makes it a left-branching language, because the more modifiers the sentence has the longer it extends to the left in Japanese. English sentences expand to the right, so if this sentence were translated it would be " John owned a cat that killed a rat that ate cheese that was rotten." If a person knows Japanese, the translation is intelligible. However, the original sentence "John *ga katte-iru neko ga koroshita nezumi ga tabeta chīzu wa kusatte-ita*" describes "the cheese was rotten" as the main idea. Usually, in English, the subject "the cheese" is placed at the beginning of the sentence. After that it explains about the cheese which was eaten by a rat, and then explains about the rat which was killed by a cat, the cat

[119] Kuno, 7-9.

which is kept by John. The English speaker is used to English word order as well as structural rules. Therefore, if an English sentence starts with the word "John," an ordinary English speaker would think "John" is the subject and might think that John was rotten. The structural differences could cause misunderstanding.

Krisher explains that Japanese communication requires an economy of words.[120] But to do this one must abbreviate the topic, subject, object, or even the verb and use the te-form, the relational "*no*" and modifier relative clauses to make a single sentence to communicate many ideas at once. All of those plus the "word final" rule are recognized syntax tools which support the idea that Japanese expression appears ambiguous.

Akamatsu discusses the thought behind Japanese replies, where the Japanese respond "yes" or "no" to the content of the sentence, but English speakers reply concerning the state or condition of the person who is to reply. In other words, the Japanese response to the question is based on the questioner's sentence, while the English reply is based on the choice of who is answering. For instance, if the question is "Did you read today's paper?," a person would reply "yes" if he or she has read the paper. To an affirmative question like this, the reply would be the same in both cultures. However, assume the question appears as negation, "Didn't you read today's paper yet?" If a person read the paper, he or she would reply "yes" in English, "no" in Japanese. "No, I read it" is the actual answer in Japanese. Negative questions in Japanese are very common. In

[120] Krisher, 34.

fact there are many Japanese who only use the negative form in their communication. The respondent to the negative question in Japanese only responds to the sentence the questioner states. If an English speaker asked a Japanese "Didn't you eat dinner yet?" responder would answer "yes, [I did] not [eat dinner] yet," if he had not. The English speaker would think that the Japanese ate dinner. However, Akamatsu notes that if a responder has eaten dinner, the answer would be "no, I have eaten."[121] While the English speaker replies to the question with emphasis on the speaker's decision or condition, the Japanese speaker replies to the content of the question.

The utilization of the linguistic techniques: communicating many thoughts in one long sentence, replying to the content of the interrogative sentence, are understood among Japanese but may appear as ambiguity to people from other communities that do not have similar language rules. In addition, the linguistic rules like the "word final" and deletion option are some of the forms which appear ambiguous to non-speakers of Japanese. Thus we may believe that the societal thought of the Japanese language is the same that formed the communication style. In other words, the way the Japanese language was structured and the way the Japanese communicate must have originated from one shared body of thought and developed together.

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[121] Akamatsu, 143.

V. Problems of Translation

The translation of a language distorts the language of a particular society. The translations of Japanese texts often create ambiguous results, if not vague or obscure ones. This chapter will study some sample comparisons with English to explain one of the reasons why the Japanese language is perceived as an ambiguous language.

The structural character of Japanese plus the attitudes and ideas that the Japanese have toward the usage of the Japanese language, as already discussed, are very different from English language character and usage. As children grow up, they learn from their society how people speak and think. Generation after generation, people continue their societal thought and the corresponding language to accompany it. Vygotsky explains how thought and language develop and relate in the mind of child.

> Thought development is determined by language, i.e., by the linguistic tools of thought and by the sociocultural experience of the child. Essentially, the development of inner speech depends on outside factors; the development of logic in the child... is a direct function of his socialized speech. The child's intellectual growth is contingent on his mastering the social means of thought, that is, language.[122]

Further, "Verbal thought is not an innate, natural form of behavior, but is determined by a historical-cultural process," and "the development of

[122] Vygotsky, 94.

behavior will be governed essentially by the general laws of the historical development of human society."[123] Roy Andrew Miller explains that language is a set of arbitrary vocal signs by means of which a social entity communicates and cooperates.[124] Value and its importance vary from one society to another; therefore, priorities that exist in each language community differ. Each society has its own logical thought. One community's logical thought is not necessarily logical to the other community.

Yanabu Akira explains that generally the text which is translated into Japanese is awkward and does not flow like natural Japanese. The usual explanation for this is that the foreign text is written logically. This therefore suggests that Japanese is illogical. However, Yanabu concludes that Japanese is logical according to the logic of the Japanese language.[125] Comparing Japanese to English, Barnlund notes, "Where English seems more sensitive to discriminations among ideas and objects, Japanese seems more sensitive to discriminations among persons and their social relationships."[126] Different societies have different thoughts and the language of each society is suited to use within the framework of each societal thought. Therefore, translations entail not only writing, speaking, reading and listening, but also involve acquiring information

[123] Ibid.

[124] Roy Andrew Miller, Nihongo (London: The Athlone Press, 1986), 124.

[125] Yanabu Akira, Hikaku Nhongo Ron (A comment on comparative Japanese). 3rd ed. (Tokyo: Nihon Honyakuka Yōsei Sentā, 1981), 27.

[126] Barnlund, Public and Private Self in Japan and the United States, 133.

about language and its relation to societal thought.

Since Japanese communication is quite complex, in terms of the difficulty of translation, Barnlund argues that in Japanese, "Sentences are not as closed with respect to meanings, encouraging listeners to consider a multiplicity of interpretations."[127] Without having some idea about how other cultures think and communicate within their communities, translated material provides a limited understanding. Even in exchanging one single idea, English and Japanese can show extreme differences. For example, how the Japanese express the situation of one English word "must" demonstrates the differences between the two cultures. It demonstrates how translation distorts societal thoughts according to the particular language spoken. When English speakers read "I must go" as translated material from Japanese, they would not doubt that Japanese have an exact equivalent word for the English "must." Reading such a translation, the English speaker would think that Japanese communicate as directly as the English do. The English speaker would not have any idea of how complicatedly Japanese circumlocute to suggest to the listener that "must" is a command word in English.

For an equivalent to the word "must," Japanese must put together the provisional or conditional form of the negated verb and add the negative form of a verb "to become." For example, from an English sentence "I must go," the Japanese sentence would be "[*watakushi wa*] *ikanakereba narimasen*" [私は]行かなければなりません. The negative form

[127] Barnlund, Public and Private Self in Japan and the United States, 132.

of "to go" in Japanese is "*ikanai*" to make this form into the provisional form "*ikanakereba*," one must add "*naranai*" which is the negative form of "*naru*" (become). So the Japanese sentence is actually saying that, " if [I] do not go, [I] do not accomplish or become [something]."

Japanese implies the speaker's intention and depends on the listener to infer. But in English, the sentence "I must go" directly and clearly states the speaker's intention. Moreover, when the Japanese say the same thing casually, the sentence would be "*ikanakute wa naranai*," "*ikanaku cha nannai*," "*ikanakya naran*," or sometime even abbreviated to "*ikanakucha*," or the even shorter "*ikanakya*." These abbreviated forms suggests different relationships between the speaker and the listener. English variations such as "I have to go," or "I gotta go," for "I must go" hardly express different relationships between the speaker and the listener as the Japanese abbreviated forms do. Therefore, the translation "I must go" to "ikanakute wa narimasen," or vice versa, hardly conveys the intention of either language. Moreover, the English speaker would think that the Japanese made the English direct command ambiguous.

A Japanese sentence which subtly suggests gets translated into one clear straight forword English sentence. Usually, the Japanese want to make, or imply, a sentence with more meanings than one. As Barnlund suggests, they encourage listeners to consider a multiplicity of interpretations.[128] But if this sentence is translated into English, the subtle references of the language disappear. Therefore, the Japanese sentence

[128] Barnlund, Public and Private Self in Japan and the United States, 133.

loses its character in which there is room for the listener or reader to infer the hinted meaning of the communication. Translation of a Japanese "*ikanakute wa narimasen*," to an English word "must go," brings a realization of what Miller means in his quote "meaning and translation cannot possibly be equated."[129] Another incident between a Japanese businessman's family in California and his mother Kiyo in Japan will help to explain Miller further. The businessman's wife Yomoko sent a photograph of their Californian garden, in which she successfully grows a variety of flowers, to her mother-in-law Kiyo in Japan. Yomoko's intention was to share her enjoyment of the beautiful flowers in her garden. However, the responding letter from Kiyo read "Having such a beautiful garden, you must spend all day long gardening." On reading this reply, Yomoko's daughter Aya and other Japanese wives interpreted it all at once as, "You are spending too much time in the garden and not taking care of my son and my grandchildren." This is an example of the Japanese listeners interpreting an indirect message. If the relation between a woman and her mother-in-law is not a good one, this interpretation would be universal. However, in this case, the relationship of Yomoko and her mother-in-law Kiyo is a good one. In fact their relationship is in such good order that the Japanese would think according to the societal norm. Yet, the responding interpretation was uniform, because the society as a whole thinks alike. Moreover, hearing Aya's response, which was the same as the others, the wives declared that

[129] Miller, 124.

Aya is maturing.[130] Aya went through all her schooling in the U.S., even graduated from a university in California, but she learned to think within the framework of her parents' society. Therefore, this daughter translated her grandmother's reply just like the other Japanese. This interpretation of indirect messages of Kiyo by Aya and the other wives implies its own indirect messages. If this were to be translated into an English text, the English reader might be lost somewhere in the multiple layers of indirect messages. Therefore, the Japanese appears ambiguous.

Another example of the result of translation may be demonstrated by a *waka* by Fujiwara Akisuke(1090 - 1155) in the Shin Kokinshū

Aki kaze ni	*秋風に*
tanabiku kumo no	*たなびく雲の*
taema yori	*絶え間より*
more-izuru tsuki no	*漏れ出ずる月の*
kage no sayakesa.[131]	*影のさやけさ*

which was translated by Hirano Umeyo in The Japanese Language by Kindaichi Haruhiko.

> The brightness
> Of the moonlight,
> Emerging from between the clouds
> That trail in the sky,
> Blown by the autumn wind.[132]

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[130] The author was present during the discussion. The names of persons are fictitious.

[131] Fukuda Kiyoto, Hyakunin Iisshu Monogatari (The story of one hundred poems, each by a different poet) (Tokyo: Kaiseisha, 1986), 164. See also Andō Tsuguo, Hyakunin Iisshu (One hundred poems, each by a different poet) (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1976), 211.

[132] Kindaichi, 233.

An analysis of the translation is in order. Translating "by the autumn wind" for "*akikaze ni*" seems to offer no problem, but the English "blown" is inferred in Japanese and not mentioned. "The clouds that trail" for "*tanabiku kumo no*" depends on how each English speaker would visualize the condition of the clouds in the word "trail." Some might understand the picture better by the word "sweeping." Again, "in the sky" is not mentioned in the *waka*. "From between" for "*taema yori*" has a slight problem. "*Taema*" is a noun which is close to the English noun "rift," "break," or "gap" or even "interval" on this occasion. "*Kumo no taema yori*" could be translated "through a rift in the clouds." "Emerging" for "*more-izuru*" is a partial translation, since it is a verb which is made by compounding two verbs. "More" from the verb "*moreru*" which means in English, "leak," "escape," "break through" or "seep," and the added verb "*izuru*" which means "emerge," "appear," or "come out." "*Moreizuru*" then is close to the English "seep out" or "break through." So, the word "emerging" seems too strong and destroys the sentiment of the message of this *waka*. "The brightness of the moonlight" for "*tsuki no kage no sayakesa*" works. However, since "sayakesa" is placed at the end, "how bright" might convey the message rather than "the brightness." To correspond to the Japanese expression, the English must be arranged totally backward. In Japanese, as an example, the favored order is as follows:

Akikazeni	By the Autumn wind
tanabiku kumono	sweeping clouds'

taemayori	through the rift
moreizuru tsukino	escaping the moonlight
kage no sayakesa	how bright [it is].

The poem is expressing the brightness of the moonlight which escapes from between the clouds. This topic comes at the end in Japanese, and at the beginning in English. Moreover, the problem is not only in the difference of the word order, but on how interpreters, readers or listeners would imagine or visualize "the brightness of the moonlight" when one language expression starts out with the wording "The brightness of the moonlight" and the other language expression ends with "the moonlight's brightness." In one language the brightness emerges and in the other the brightness seeps (breaks) through. The Japanese imagines nature touched by the soft moonlight and even imagines feeling the clean, quiet, cool autumn air in the later expression.

This *waka* was written almost nine centuries ago. Therefore, words like "*taema*," "*izuru*," "*kage*," and "*sayakesa*" are classical words which are still being used in traditional vocabularies especially for *waka* making. The traditional vocabularies are thought to have more taste socially; therefore, they are popular among *waka* poets. But it is difficult to convey not only the intention of poet but also the taste and the attachment that the Japanese have toward classical expression in translation. As explained in chapter one, the *waka* is expressed with a condensed meaning, the implication is greater than the regular text. Therefore, the translation of the *waka* into another language looses its original implication, taste and attachment of the people in its culture.

An excerpt from the book Nihonjin to Yudayajin (The Japanese and the Jews) which is written in Japanese and the book The Japanese and the Jews which is translated into English by Richard Gage might be compared. The English text is written in a precisely organized style which appeals to the common ideas of English speakers where the Japanese book is written in an order which appeals to the values and the common ideas of the Japanese. The English translation, which is supposedly a rough equivalent of the Japanese version, goes thus:

> ... [A]ll Japanese children are trained in numbers, at any rate in the use of the abacus. Oddly enough, however, no Japanese children are subjected to similar training in the employment of words. When a mother tells her child to say something correctly, she is referring not to grammar, but to the intricate levels of courtesy involved in speaking Japanese.... What does count for a great deal, however, is the way things are said; that is, the attitude of the speaker, his intonation, and his regard for matters of courtesy.... When a mother corrects her child's language in Japan these are the things she has in mind.[133]

The text, which is supposed to be an English equivalent of the Japanese, is shown here beside the Japanese original:

Suguni atama ni ukabu noga "kazu" to "kotoba"no hijū no sa de aru.

Nihonjin wa sugu ni kazu no kyōiku o hajimeru kara, kazu o atsukawasereba (sore ga sara ni soroban de kunren sareru to) masa ni sekai ichi de aru.	All Japanese children are trained in numbers, at any rate in the use of the abacus.
... [D]aga ippō, kotoba no kunren	Oddly enough, however, no

[133] Isaiah Ben-Dasan, The Japanese and the Jews, translated by Richard L. Gage (New York: John Weatherhill, Inc., 1972), 185.

to naru to, kore no hijū wa hijō ni karui to iu yori "nai" to itta hō ga yoi.	Japanese children are subjected to similar training in the employment of words.
... [Sore wa kaiwa ni okeru kotoba no mondai de naku, mushiro taido, gochō, reigi no mondai de aru koto ga wakaru.	...What does count for a great deal, however, is the way things are said, that is, the attitude of the speaker, his intonation, and his regard for matters of courtesy....
Hahaoya ga kodomo ni "chan to osshai" to iu baai, meiseki katsu tōmei (eigo nara kuriyā) ni ie to iu koto de naku, hassei, kyoshi, taido ga mohandōri de are to iu koto de aru.	When a mother tells her child to say something correctly, she is referring not to grammar, but to the intricate level of courtesy involved in speaking Japanese....
	When a mother corrects her child's language in Japan these are the things she has in mind.

すぐに頭に浮かぶのが「数」と「言葉」の比重の差である。日本人はすぐに数の教育をはじめるから、数を扱わせれば（それがさらにソロバンで訓練されると）まさに世界一である。... だが一方言葉の訓練となると、これの比重は非常に軽いというより「ない」と言った方が良い。・・・それは会話における言葉の問題でなく、むしろ態度、語調、礼儀の問題であることがわかる。　母親が子供に「チャント　オッシャイ」という場合、明晰かつ透明（英語のクリヤー-）に言えということでなく、発声、挙止、態度が模範通りであれということである。[134]

Again the equivalence need analysis. The English text ignores the first sentence in the Japanese text, *sugu ni atama ni ukabu no ga "kazu" to "kotoba" no hijū no sa de aru.* (Right away, what comes to mind, is the difference in importance of numbers and words.) The second sentence,

[134] Isaiah Ben-Dasan, pseudonym for Yamamoto Shichihei, Nihonjin to Yudayajin (The Japanese and the Jews) (Tokyo: Yamamoto Shoten, 1971), 177, 178.

"*Nihonjin wa, sugu ni kazu no kyōiku o hajimeru kara, kazu o atsukawasereba [sore ga sara ni soroban de kunren sareru to] masa ni sekai ichi de aru*" (Japanese start education in numbers early and manipulate numbers [if they are trained farther in the abacus], so they are the best in the world) is rendered, "All Japanese children are trained in numbers, at any rate in the use of the abacus." The English part does not say how well or how soon the Japanese are trained in numbers. Instead, the English version reads "all Japanese children," while the Japanese text says that the Japanese children are trained in numbers. After this, the Japanese text continues with how good the Japanese are, especially if trained the use of the abacus; whereas, the English translation of the equivalent section was condensed and placed before the phrase starting from "All Japanese children...." For the Japanese "*daga ippō, kotoba no kunren to naru to, kore no hijū wa hijō ni karui to iu yori 'nai' to itta hō ga yoi.*" (but, on the other hand, if we talk about training in language, rather than saying its importance is light it is better to say there is 'none'), the English equivalent is given as, "Oddly enough, however, no Japanese children are subjected to similar training in the employment of words." The Japanese text goes on to explain more about comparing mathematical training to conversational training in Japan, which the English equivalent ignores, until the Japanese "...*sore wa kaiwa ni okeru kotoba no mondai de naku*" (the problem is not with the words at the conversational level), which is rendered as " she is referring not to grammar." For the Japanese quote "*mushiro taido, gochō, reigi no mondai de aru koto ga wakaru*" (it

is understandable that rather, it is a problem of attitude, intonation and courtesy), the English reads, "What does count for a great deal, however, is the way things are said; that is, the attitude of the speaker, his intonation, and his regard for matters of courtesy." For the Japanese "*hahaoya ga kodomo ni 'chan to osshai' to iu baai...*" (when a mother says 'speak right' to a child), the English is given as, "When a mother tells her child to say something correctly." "*Chan to osshai*" is language that only a Japanese mother can use with her child. It has motherly authority in a tone that the society understands. Otherwise, there are many other ways to say "Speak right" in Japanese. For the Japanese "*meiseki katsu tōmei (eigo no kuriyā) ni ie to iu koto de naku, hassei, kyoshi, taido ga mohan dōri de are to iu koto de aru*" (the child is not instructed to speak distinctly and clearly, rather that articulation, behavior and manner should follow the correct model). For this part the English reads, "but to the intricate levels of courtesy involved in speaking Japanese." The English section continues by comparing Latin and other Indo-European languages to Japanese; whereas the Japanese text has a similar part later. Then the English text gets back to the child's communication skills, and adds "When a mother corrects her child's language in Japan these are the things she has in mind." All together, the Japanese mind is understanding something like:

> Right away, what comes to mind is the difference in importance of numbers and words. Japanese start education in and manipulation of numbers early. [If they are trained farther in the abacus], they are the best in the world. On the other hand, if we talk about training in

> language, rather than saying its importance is light it is better to say there is "none." The problem is not with words at the conversational level. It is rather a problem of attitude, intonation and courtesy. When a mother says "speak right" to her child, the child is not instructed to speak distinctly and clearly, instead that articulation, behavior and manner should follow the correct model.

In other words, speaking in broad general terms, both languages express the content of the text in the manner in which each society thinks. Each society has their own logical way of thinking which is thought of as the common sense of that particular society. Therefore, this English translation of the Japanese text expresses no consideration of how the Japanese think and why. Read in English, this passage conveys the idea that the Japanese mother trains or educates her child to be courteous; therefore, she chooses and arranges her words accordingly. This is due to the text, "...when a mother corrects her child's language in Japan..." But in reading the Japanese text, "*hahaoya ga kodomo ni 'chan' to osshai' to iu baai...*" (when a mother tells her child 'speak correctly'...), would the English reader understand the subtle suggestion that the Japanese reflect in the backs of their minds, "a mother is telling her child to take responsibility for what is said and how [it] is said in addition to the conveying direct information?"

Consider an occasion, in which an English reader discusses the content of what hè has read with a Japanese reader who supposedly has read the same book in Japanese. Each would think that the other had read the same content, one in English, the other in Japanese. The English reader would say clearly what he has read, and the Japanese reader would

respond passively and ambiguously, because the English description does not match his or her understanding of the content. The Japanese would avoid the situation which might lead to the conflict. Both of them are the victims of the translation in this case.

The following is an examination of excerpts from Dean Barnlund's Public and Private Self in both English and Japanese. Phrase by phrase, the Japanese translation follows the order of the English text faithfully. The Japanese phrases are displayed at the side of the English:

Ambiguity, of course, cuts two ways.	*Muron, aimai na hyōgen wa ryōba no ken no yō na mono de aru.*
It makes the assertion of any opinion more dangerous since the speaker has less control over the meaning assigned to it:	*Hitotsu wa, hanashite wa jibun no itta koto ni taishite kikugawa kara ataeru imi o sore hodo kontorōru dekinai kara, donna imi demo dangen suru koto wa soredake kiken de aru.*
a mild criticism that is phrased ambiguously may be interpreted as a sharp rebuke.	*Hikaeme na hihan o aimai ni hyōgen sureba, tsūretsu na hinan to torareru kamo shirenai.*
Yet it also provides a better vehicle for passive defense, permitting the speaker to obscure a vital disagreement in an equivocal statement:	*Shikashi ippō de wa, kono aimai na hyōgen ga shōkyokuteki hōgyohō no dentatsu shudan to shite kōtsugō de, dochira nimo toreru yō na iikata o sureba kiwamete jūdai na iken no sōi mo hanashite wa boyakasu koto ga dekiru shi,*
a vague remark provides a form of reply without	*boyaketa iikata o sureba, jissai niwa nani mo hakkiri iwazu ni*

really saying anything.[135]

hentō suru koto mo dekiru no de aru.

無論、曖昧な表現は両刃の剣のようなものである。　1つは　話し手は自分の言ったことに対して聞く側から与える意味をそれほどコントロールできないから、どんな意味でも断言することはそれだけ危険である。控えめな批判を曖昧に表現すれば、痛烈な非難ととられるかもしれない。　しかし　一方ではこの曖昧な表現が消極的防御法の伝達手段として好都合で、どちらにもとれるような言い方をすればきわめて重大な意見の相違も話し手はぼやかすことができるし、ぼやけた言い方をすれば実際には何もはっきり言わずに返答することもできるのである。[136]

The Japanese translation follows the order of the original text; however, there are subtle differences in expression. Again, an analysis is in order. In the first sentence, for English "ambiguity," Japanese uses "*aimai na hyōgen*" (ambiguous or vague expression). For "cuts two ways," "*ryōba no ken no yōna mono de aru*" (It is like a double edged sword). At the beginning of the second sentence, the Japanese text reads "*hitotsu wa*" (one is), and an addition, "*jibun no itta koto ni taishite*" (as for what oneself says), then goes on, but the Japanese word "*taishite*" means "contrary to what one says." For "less control" the Japanese reads, "*sorehodo kontorōru dekinai*" (cannot control as much). "*Kiku gawa kara ataeru imi*" (the meaning that the listener gives) for "the meaning assigned to it", where "it" implies "to the words that the speaker said," although that is not explicitly stated. "*Soredake*" (that much) for "more." In the third sentence, for the English "a mild criticism that is phrased ambiguously," the Japanese translation reads "*hikaeme na hihan o aimai*

[135] Barnlund, Public and Private Self in Japan and the United States, 133.

[136] Barnlund, Public and Private Self in Japan and the United States, 158.

ni hyōgen sureba" (If one expresses a mild criticism ambiguously). In the fourth sentence, after "*shikashi*"(yet), the Japanese adds "*ippōde wa*" (on one side). For the English "it," the Japanese supplies "*aimai na hyōgen*" (ambiguous expression). An equivalent word for "also" is placed at the latter part of the next sentence in Japanese. For "for passive defense" the Japanese use "*shōkyokuteki bōgyohō no dentatsu shudan to shite*" (as a means of communication for passive defense). For the English phrase, "the speaker to obscure," the Japanese offers, "*hanashi te wa boyakasu koto ga dekiru*" (the speaker can blur it). In the final sentence, the Japanese adds "*hakkiri*" (clearly) to "say nothing."

The Japanese translation of the English text says to the Japanese mind something like:

> Ambiguous expression is like a sword with a double edged blade. One side is: it is dangerous to assert any opinion that strongly, since the speaker cannot control whether the listener will give a meaning contrary to [the meaning of] what the speaker [intended to] say. If the speaker expresses a mild criticism ambiguously, it may be interpreted as a sharp rebuke. But on the another hand since this ambiguous expression is convenient as a communication vehicle for passive defence, the speaker can obscure a vital difference of opinion. If the speaker expresses a way of saying that could be understood either way, also if speaker says something ambiguously, actually it is possible to reply without saying anything.

These differences in languages coincide with the differences of two societies' ways of thought. English is written for the English speakers who think in the way for which the English language is suitable, as do the Japanese with their language. Social thought and language are fibers of the society. As Vygotsky suggested above earlier, "Thought development

is determined by language;" "the development of inner speech depends on outside factors;" and the "development of logic ... is a direct function of his socialized speech."[137] Without knowing how the fibers are woven in the particular culture, translators risk distortion both of the text and of the translation.

This sample comparative examination of English and Japanese indicates that even though the translation of English into Japanese loses clarity and directness, communicating the message is not difficult. It also leaves some room for interpretation of meaning depending on how the reader or listener infers the meaning, which the Japanese automatically do. On the other hand, the translation from Japanese to English has the tendency not to clarify the intention of a Japanese text, because the intention is not clearly and directly expressed there. In other words, if the translator translates unclear or indirect statements into English which are understood only as a clear, direct message, the English speakers would be misled into believing the clear direct translation covers all the nuances and complexities of the original Japanese text. Thus Miller's statement, "The attempted cross-over that would bridge separate and mutually irrelevant entities and that thus lies at the heart of the semantic fallacy is always putatively performed by subjecting the language under inspection to translation ...,"[138] explains that faulty understandings of meaning would be caused by the translated text.

[137] Vygotsky, 94.

[138] Miller, 122.

The translation of text distorts understanding. When communication takes place among people in one community, the inner ear of the communicants are tuned in to their common societal thought and heard within the consciousness of their culture. However, when people from other communities, especially the Western community, listen to or read Japanese translations, their inner ear cannot activate the Japanese consciousness. Therefore, to the people of other cultures expressions in Japanese often seem ambiguous.

CONCLUSION

This thesis examines the reasons why Japanese communication seems ambiguous. There are some understandable reasons: The sociocultural background of the Japanese language and its relation to syntax has affected the way people think. Ancient Japanese beliefs and customs formed societal ideas about communication. From early times, the Japanese embraced the idea of *kotodama* and the power of words and one's responsibility to speak knowing that power. Waka poetry demonstrates that such ideas have continued to the present.

Social consciousness developed in the early community and affected societal thought and ways of communication. The Japanese came to feel a responsibility not to disturb the minds of those in the community. They formed a framework of communal logic which was sensitive to peaceful communication. This communal logic solidified largely because for a thousand years virtually no other culture impinged on Japan's communal logic which was therefore untinged by the logic of others.

The Japanese express in their language the way their society thinks. Japanese communication reflects traditional ideas that talkative people are not encouraged. Disagreement is shown by silence. Consideration for others and negation of self is apparant in the Japanese language. Japanese syntax thus relates to their way of communication. Syntax is loose and

flexible. It allows the listener to infer. So, Japanese syntax helps expression to be ambiguous. It avoids the confrontational out of consideration for the listener. Japanese suggests rather than states. Thus Japanese expression contains the possibility of multiple meanings. This does not bother Japanese listeners because they share societal thought with everyone in their culture. When translations from Japanese are attempted, however, the multiple meanings are lost or distorted. Hence, the conclusion that Japanese is often ambiguous.

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